DARKNESS OR LIGHT

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DARKNESS OR LIGHT

AN ESSAY IN
THE THEORY OF DIVINE CONTEMPLATION

BY

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TO ALL THE LOVERS

but especially

THE FRESH RECRUITS

of the

MYSTIC—SOLDIER—SAINT

OF LOYOLA.

3884

FOREWORD

This work is not a historical treatise on mystical prayer; nor is it intended as a guide to the contemplative life. It is merely an effort to apply certain theological principles to the subject and to throw into strong relief one aspect of divine contemplation. I am aware that the subject is not one that should be lightly approached, nor are my qualifications for writing even an essay about it felt to be of a high order. But if the greatness of the topic and the promptings of modesty alone were taken into account, how few would be the books written about prayer! The fact that of recent years the press has been teeming with such books does not diminish the misgivings of a writer, for perhaps more will be expected from him in proportion to the mass of current literature on mysticism, much of which proceeds from authors of high repute.

It is not then because I hope to utter a final word, still less because I have any novel views to propound, that I have been rash enough to enter the lists. I have merely satisfied myself that several of my predecessors have strayed unconsciously perhaps from the old beaten path, and I think that by pointing out that path I may do a service to some who are on its verge, by strengthen-

ing their desire to seek God where he delights to manifest himself. If I have sometimes adopted a somewhat dogmatic tone where hesitation might be expected, I ask the reader not to ascribe to me the vice of infallibility but merely a conviction that it is better to offer downright statements, leaving to critics a corresponding degree of freedom in dealing with them. Thus where my book fails to cut any ice, it may yet perform the useful office of a whetstone.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Mysticism and Dogma	1
II.	Mysticism and Natural Theology	24
III.	Natural Contemplation	41
IV.	Perverted Mysticism	86
V.	The Catholic Mysticism	110
VI.	Further Description of Mystical Prayer	135
VII.	Is Mystical Knowledge Vision?	161
VIII.	Can Mysticism be Explained by Volition?	180
IX.	Mysticism and Sanctity	195
X.	In what does Sanctification Consist?	218
XI.	Divine Faith and Mysticism	234
XII.	Is Faith a Mystical Virtue?	248
XIII.	Divine Contemplation and the Ascetic Life	265

DARKNESS OR LIGHT?

CHAPTER I.

Mysticism and Dogma.

We cannot commence this chapter with a strict definition of mysticism, for it is the object of the following essay to investigate the subject, to arrive at a decision as to how the mystical knowledge and love of God is constituted. But we can make it clear to the reader, and perhaps earn his gratitude for doing so, in which of the more or less accepted senses we intend to use the term. For we have ourselves found in several modern books about mysticism a tendency to confuse matters which had better be kept distinct. There may be several shades of meaning attached to the phrases *mystical experience, mystical prayer, mystical doctrine,* and the like. But for our purpose it is at least very necessary that we should distinguish two such uses, one that is more broad and general, the other that is precise and technical. Each of these is legitimate in its own context, but it will not do to confuse them in a book about contemplation.

By "mystical" in the broader sense of the word,

I understand anything which transcends the senses or at least transcends the use of our natural reason when it argues from sense-impressions. Thus the existence of aether as a medium for light waves, though not cognizable by sense directly, is indirectly referred to it; and to accept aether as a fact, or at least as a probable hypothesis, would not be a transcendental act, nor would believing in it be a "mystical" belief. In like manner, to believe in the existence of God as Absolute Being and First Cause of all contingent being is not (at least according to the view common amongst Catholics) a mystical act, because the doctrine can be rationally derived through our senses. On the other hand it is perhaps debatable whether any interior conviction, based upon a supposed revelation or a subjective intuition, that one is personally bound to render service to such a Deity as reason postulates could be properly termed "mystical." [1]

If the affirmative be admitted, then all religion must be considered mystical. Whether this is so or not, it is quite certain that the Catholic Faith is mystical in the wide sense we are now considering, for it includes adhesion to revealed truths, some of which fully transcend reason in the sense that no created intellect can naturally attain to them.

[1] This suggests that the connotation of the term "mystical" when used in its broader sense, is somewhat vague. We believe it to be so, but this aspect of the term does not affect us deeply.

The more technical meaning of the word is very different and perhaps upon the whole clearer. Although we do not yet see our way to define the true nature of mysticism proper, we can sufficiently limit its application as being all that is ordinarily meant by Mystical as contrasted with Dogmatic Theology. There is quite a definite body of literature upon the subject, in regard to the great bulk of which no Catholic, even slightly versed in the subject, would hesitate as to its characterization. People are usually acquainted with the names of the great classical authorities on the subject, being also aware that they treat mainly of a kind of contemplation which is different from the ordinary prayer of the faithful. They may not always have accurate notions of what constitutes mystical prayer in this special sense, though it is likely that their instincts are truer than some of the theories which are propounded on the subject. But that question is one that does not concern us at the moment. We are merely stating our belief that when we set out to treat of "mysticism" as such, when we are going to discuss what is meant by "mystical" knowledge and love of God, by "mystical" prayer and "mystical" phenomena—then to slip into a broad and general use of the terms (which might suit a different context well enough) does not make for clearness or accuracy.

Yet we regret to say that in several recent publications there has been a tendency to obscure these differences. We believe that this is due to a desire

to weaken any prejudice that exists against mystical prayer by widening out the application of the term, and by insisting on the relation that exists between it and other kinds of prayer. Any such motive, if it exists, would be a mistaken idea which could only frustrate the laudable intentions of those who entertain it. We must be aware that the same sort of cloudiness surrounds many a term in ordinary use—adjectives like "artistic," "socialistic," or even "democratic" may have several shades of meaning according to the context in which they occur, and we know how confusing it is when people use one meaning while they pretend to use another, or perhaps honestly think that they do. When a word has a definitely technical meaning, in a technical treatise that meaning ought to be adhered to. To give a concrete instance of what we mean, the word "conscience" can be used in a wider sense, much like "consciousness," or in the narrower and more ethical sense which is familiar to everybody. Now suppose one writing about ethical principles or obligations should make free use of this term in a complicated argument, and then deliberately turn round and say that he did not recognise any difference between "conscience" and "consciousness"—he would hardly make for clarity and might reduce his readers to a state of bewilderment. It appears to me to be a similar perversion of language in a treatise on "mystical" prayer, to turn round and declare that the prayer of Catholics is always "mystical" because it implies

faith, which transcends all empirical knowledge.

I have therefore thought it necessary at the commencement of my book to make it quite clear that, however anxious I might be to predispose my readers in favour of mysticism, I shall not attempt to do so by stretching the meaning of the term. It is possible that we might have to use it in a vague sense, but never we hope under circumstances where confusion could result. We desire not to identify things that should be strictly distinguished. Therefore the reader may understand that, unless the contrary is stated or clearly implied, we shall be always dealing with mysticism or mystical contemplation in its proper narrow and technical sense, and not in its vaguer and less scientific signification of the Supernatural.

With this proviso, we may now turn to the subject of this Chapter, the relation between mysticism and dogma. It appears to be most important that this relation should be clearly apprehended. In the first place there is indeed a great difference between what is sometimes called Mystical, and Dogmatic Theology, not merely in regard to the subject matter, but as to its necessary treatment. All Catholic authorities, as far as we are aware, agree that Mystical theology must not and cannot be treated upon merely theoretic lines. In a sense it is a real science and is capable of scientific treatment, but its proper material is constituted by psychological facts which at best can be treated merely as experimental truths. Whereas dogma

treats not merely of the most abstract truths known to the human mind, but often of truths which cannot possibly be verified by experiment, as they depend wholly and solely upon Divine revelation. This difference is sometimes expressed by saying that Dogmatic Theology is a theoretic, and Mystical Theology a practical science. Most of the great mystical writers, like St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and St. Ignatius, describe mental phenomena of which they have had experience at first hand. In any case they deal with events which they have assured themselves really happened.

Such being the difference between these two branches of the divine science, it is not surprising that in these days of specialized study, there has been something in the nature of a divorce between them. Such we think is what has happened, and if it is so, it is surely a matter for deep regret.

It seems, therefore, worth while to put in a plea for a definite co-ordination of these two very distinct branches of theology. No treatment of mysticism can be of any value whatever unless it is entirely based upon dogmatic science. On the other hand Mystical Theology ought not to be passed over or treated with scant courtesy by the exponents of dogma, who are not entitled to treat any known facts as unimportant for their study, and Catholic Mysticism is a fact, not a small one either. Let us dwell upon both sides of this appeal.

There are several reasons why the mystical writers of to-day ought to look carefully to their theological equipment. It would be invidious to pick out individual instances of deficiency, but those who are well acquainted with contemporary writing on the subject must be aware that it frequently displays at least a haziness about theological teaching. It is nigh impossible to touch upon any aspect of contemplation without making statements which involve doctrines about God or divine grace or the soul or beatitude or virtues moral or theological. Sometimes it will happen that writers are specially fixing their attention upon the psychological side of mysticism, where new developments of psychical science are called into service, and this is in itself laudable. These new facts or theories undoubtedly contribute to make the study of mysticism attractive, and on all grounds it is most important that they should be understood and properly applied to the many deep problems which are involved in mystical theology. But new knowledge or new ideas do not tend to make complicated questions easier or safer to be discussed without a sound foundation of theological knowledge. And we need hardly point out that as modern psychology is mainly, and speculation about the mystical life largely, in the hands of non-Catholics, it becomes all the more important for Catholics dealing with these matters to be sure of their dogmatic foothold.

If, however, we turn to the other side of the ques-

tion, there is something to be said about modern textbooks of theology. We are not sure that the writers have not sometimes an attitude almost of contempt for the sister science, as though it does not lend itself to exact treatment, or at least that the experience of mystics can be no concern of theirs. Undoubtedly mystical experiences require to be carefully sifted before they can throw light upon the problems of theology. But it is part of the province of theologians to assist in the unravelment of practical difficulties; and there is no wisdom whatever in assuming that all mystical experience is to be waived aside as something purely subjective and emotional. The greater mystics, Aquinas, Loyola, Teresa of Jesus, and her companion Carmelite, John of the Cross, are not people whose testimony as to their own psychological state is to be treated lightly; and there is no reason whatever to assume that in later times mysticism has degenerated in character because its age is less hoary.

Thus if theologians find that in certain books mysticism is degenerating into something near to sentiment and lacks the backbone which Catholic dogma can alone supply, they might perhaps examine their own consciences and ask whether the professors of their science are not also responsible for the deficiencies they deplore in others. We venture to put the case before them thus boldly because there has been already noted a tendency on the part of dogmatic writers towards putting the matter

right. The fact is that the world-movement towards mysticism is so strong that it is almost forcing its attention upon the learned; and we are not without hope that among professors of Scholastic philosophy there are some who will look with favour upon any attempt to re-establish mysticism as part of their province.

We say "re-establish," because the state of things which has existed in our time is of comparatively recent growth. In the great days many of the most learned theologians were also mystics, while the grandest mystics were also adepts at theology. It is only necessary to name St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Suarez, Lessius, or, at an earlier date, St. Gregory, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard, all of them eminent mystics, to show how closely connected were these two aspects of theology, the abstract and the practical. Of course it is evident that many names of great authority can be given on the opposite side. Neither St. Teresa nor St. Ignatius can be ranked as dogmatic theologians; St. Margaret Mary, to say nothing of St. Joan of Arc, knew nothing of dogmatic science, yet in different ways, they and others like them have influenced our knowledge of mysticism, though not always as writers. It would be tiresome to give long lists of names to demonstrate the organic connection that has existed in the Catholic Church between devotion and theology. We prefer to occupy our pages with a somewhat fuller account of a small number of persons, and especially of two gi-

ants of dogmatic teaching whose names we have just mentioned.

In regard to the mysticism of the Angelical Doctor (which is indeed sufficiently well known) we can hardly do better than quote the eloquent testimony of a member of his order, Rev. Prof. D. J. Kennedy, O. P., of the Catholic University of America,[1] who writes:—

"Even if we do not accept as literally true the declaration of John XXII that St. Thomas wrought as many miracles as there are articles in the *summa,* we must nevertheless go beyond natural causes in attempting to explain his extraordinary career and wonderful writings. Besides the gift of purity miraculously granted at the time of the mystic girding, his spirit of prayer, his great piety and devotion, drew down blessings on his studies. He said, 'In reading the *Conferences* of Cassian I find devotion, whence I readily ascend to contemplation.' He never began to study without invoking the assistance of God in prayer, and when he wrestled with obscure passages of the Scripture he added fasting to prayer. To Fr. Reginald he declared that he had learned more in prayer and contemplation than he had acquired from men and books. Mysterious messages came, as we learn from the same source, to encourage and enlighten him. The Bl. Virgin appeared to assure him that his life and works were acceptable to God,

[1] Summarised from the article, "St. Thomas Aquinas" in the *Cath. Encycl.*, Vol. XIV, p. 670.

and that he would persevere in his vocation. SS. Peter and Paul came to aid him in interpreting an obscure passage in Isaias. He was frequently abstracted and in ecstasy, towards the end of his life the ecstasies became more frequent, and at Naples, in 1273, three of the brethren saw him lifted in ecstasy and heard a voice proceeding from the Crucifix on the altar, saying, 'Thou hast written well of me, Thomas; what reward would thou have?' and Thomas replied, 'None other than Thyself, Lord.' His abstraction in the presence of King Louis IX (St. Louis) and of distinguished visitors are related by all biographers." Later Fr. Kennedy justly remarks:—

"The *Summa Theologica* may be made a manual of piety as well as a text-book for the study of theology. St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Pius V, St. Antoninus, constantly studied St. Thomas. Nothing could be more inspiring than his treatises on Christ, on His Sacred Person, on His life and sufferings. His treatise on the Sacraments, especially on Penance and the Eucharist, would melt even hardened hearts. The Encyclical Letter of Leo XIII on the Holy Spirit is drawn largely from St. Thomas, and those who have studied the I^a II^a and the II^a II^a know how admirably the Saint explains the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Ghost, as well as the Beatitudes, and their relation to the different virtues."

This must suffice for the strong and vital connec-

tion between mysticism and dogma as illustrated by the personality and the work of the greatest of Catholic theologians. Now let us turn to the great Jesuit Doctor, Suarez, where we shall find the same bond almost as illustriously displayed. About ten years back a large and very delightful biography appeared in France [1] which must have been a revelation to those who only knew of Father Suarez as the "Doctor Eximius." His own religious brethren knew indeed that he was as distinguished for piety as for learning, and that as for the latter, he had been known to declare that he would sooner renounce all the science which had cost him the labour of so many years of study than a single hour of mental prayer. But all the same they perhaps could hardly imagine how blessed he had been in his spiritual life, and how many marks even of extraordinary favour God had showered upon him during his career. As in the case of St. Thomas, his gift of prayer was associated with that of virginal purity which we have the best evidence [1] for believing was never besmirched from the time of virginal purity which we have the best evidence [2]

When we recall the amount and the quality of his twenty-six volumes of theological writing, we

[1] *François Suarez de la C. de Jesus*, by Père R. de Scorraille. S. J. (Paris) 1911.

[2] That of Rev. Antonio de Abreu, Rector of the College at Coimbra, to whom Suarez made a general confession of his whole life in religion within less than two years of his death in 1617. The Rector wrote this to the General of the Society, Fr. M. Vitelleschi.

can understand that his uninterrupted union with God was in itself a marvel of divine grace. He has written on no subject more triumphantly than upon the virtue of religion and the gift of contemplation, and his biographer [1] points out that he must be guided by his own experience when he declares that the study of divine things ought not to interfere with true contemplation. "A theologian of the heart not less than the intellect, he spoke to God even more often than he spoke of him."

There was a general belief among his intimate friends that Suarez was favoured by extraordinary graces in his mystical union with God. One of his secretaries, who suspected that he had experienced the grace of ecstasy in prayer, once had the temerity to ask him out of curiosity, "Father, tell me, what really ecstasy is." The mystic had written six chapters on the subject in his Treatise on Prayer, but he suspected his interlocutor's aim and just replied "I know nothing about it."

With regard to two special occasions when he suffered ecstasy very clear evidence is afforded by an eye-witness, the Brother who attended on Father Suarez, and who (ordered by his confessor) wrote a detailed account upon oath of what he had seen, sealing it up in a packet with directions not to open it during Father Suarez' lifetime. Having raised a curtain he had seen the priest for the space of a *Credo* lifted from the floor of his cell five palms, and kneeling with his hands joined before

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 294 and 295.

a crucifix—"out of which proceeded a light so great as to have a blinding effect, so that I could not even remain in the cell without feeling dazed by the light. These rays were falling upon the face and breast of Father Suarez. About a quarter of an hour later, the Father came forth and I told him he was wanted by the Rector of the University, who was waiting for him. He asked why I had not called him at once, and I said I had done so, and he had not replied. He then drew me into his cell, and joining his hands, with tears begged me to say nothing of what I had seen, at least during his life. I promised this, but asked permission to tell my Confessor, who was also his own. This he readily granted." [1]

Père Scorraille also relates a revelation which was accorded to Suarez as to the future of a Father who consulted him as to going on the Foreign Mission. The latter was informed that he would become Provincial of the Philippines, and twice Rector of the College of Manilla, which afterwards happened. The biographer adds that such graces as these do not of themselves imply mystic virtue in a heroic degree, but that they very often accompany it. In the case of Fr. Suarez there is too much evidence of his sanctity to leave us any room for doubt about it.

Having alluded to this illustrious Jesuit, who combined eminence as a theologian with the purest mysticism, may we mention another very interest-

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 301–2.

ing and in some respects similar case, that of Bl. Robert Bellarmine who was a contemporary of Suarez and his brother in the Society of Jesus. There is perhaps not such direct testimony to his mystical life as we have given of the eminent Doctor, and Bellarmine's life was more taken up in public affairs, though he too was a professor in his earlier days. But if we consider the facts of his life and the way he speaks of his contemplative habits, we can hardly avoid thinking that he like St. Thomas and Suarez was very closely united to God. Clement VIII, when he forced him in virtue of holy obedience to accept the Cardinal's hat, declared "that the Church of God had not his equal in learning." Yet Bellarmine was far less distinguished as a dogmatic theologian than as an undaunted champion of the Faith against the errors of Protestantism. Beza declared of one of his volumes, "this book alone completely prostrates us to the ground." Translations of some part of his writings appeared in over fifty languages, and in many universities including those of Oxford and Cambridge, chairs or lectureships were created to provide for the refutation of Bellarmine's controversial writings.

His holiness was undoubted and was attested by miracles and by a gift of prophecy, and soon after his death the cause of his canonization was commenced, being afterwards re-introduced at four different dates, in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Various circumstances delayed its progress;

but during the tercentenary year of his death, on Dec. 22, 1920, a decree declaring the heroicity of his virtues was signed by the late Pope Benedict XV on the anniversary of his own episcopal consecration. His Holiness considered it an auspicious event not merely for the Society of Jesus, but for the whole Catholic Church, declaring that he wished the Venerable Bellarmine to be regarded as a model not merely for the clergy, but also for the laity of our times. For, he added, "nothing is now so necessary as the formation of a phalanx of propagandists of Catholic Truth; therefore who could be better proposed as a perfect example for such a phalanx than Bellarmine the Prince of Catholic controversialists?"

But our concern with this Jesuit, now beatified, lies solely in his interior contemplation and union with God. He was constrained by the director of his conscience to leave us an account of his life and career, but it relates mainly to his exterior activity and says little about his prayer. However there are several indications of a strong mystical spirit in this and other documents.[1] For instance he says that in the Conclave of Paul V.—when he was aware that his name was much spoken of, to his great distress, for the tiara—he remained alone constantly praying that God would send whom he would, but that he would deliver him from the

[1] Especially in a dedicatory epistle to Paul V: *Vide "Responsio Juris ad Animadversiones"* of the Promoter of the Faith (Rome, 1675,) p. 9.

Papacy. And at an earlier date, when he was chosen as Cardinal, he determined that his love of sacred contemplation should not be interfered with by his external duties. Wherefore he spent all his free time and especially at night (he only gave four hours to sleep) in meditating on the Psalter "non sine animi delectatione." He also tells us that he was made aware more than once of his future circumstances, and that he prophesied correctly the deaths of two Popes, Sixtus V and Clement VIII, but on one occasion, he adds in humility "by what spirit I was led when I said this I know not, but so it happened." Many witnesses averred that he lived continually united to God in prayer and also that when he preached his face was seen to shine with heavenly light.[1]

Taking all the facts into account we can hardly be far wrong in classing Robert Bellarmine among those who excelled in uniting the contemplative spirit with the highest theological attainments. His success as a controversialist was certainly due in great measure to the saintliness of his life and that perfect spirit of recollection which is accounted by St. Teresa as the very crown of the mystical life.

As this subject is of such supreme importance, we will not close the present chapter without re-

[1] This was most remarked on the occasion of a sermon in honour of St. Gregory, but the date of the event is not given in the *Relatio. Vid. Summarium super dubio* (Rome) 1675, pp. 16, 52, 56, 100.

ferring to an instance of the union of dogma with a mystical spirit in the case of one who, if less illustrious than those hitherto recorded, may yet interest the reader as belonging almost to our own time. We refer to the late Dr. W. G. Ward, Professor of Dogmatic Theology [1] at St. Edmund's College, Ware. His attainments are pretty well guaranteed by the fact that Father Whitty, ex-Provincial of the Jesuits, testified that "his wide acquaintance with the whole range of Scholastic theology made the great Jesuit theologian, Fr. O'Reilly,[2] say of him that he had never met his equal for minute and extensive dogmatic reading." And Fr. Butler, O.S.C.,[3] who had studied in Rome under Cardinal Franzelin, wrote: "Ward was as truly a representative theologian of the Church as Franzelin himself. . . . and in some respects he surpassed Franzelin." [4]

He was a great friend of Tennyson and was a founder and at one time President of the Metaphysical Society, to which Tennyson, Huxley, Rus-

[1] This was in fact his position; but out of humility, on account of his position as a layman, he refused the appellation, and was called merely Assistant Lecturer in Theology. He insisted, moreover, that a priest of some official standing should always be present at his lectures to give confidence to himself and his students.

[2] Of the Irish Province. Those who knew the facts about Newman's career will remember in what high terms he spoke of Fr. O'Reilly's own theological knowledge.

[3] Later Rector of St. Charles' College, London.

[4] *W. G. Ward and the Catholic Revival*, by Wilfred Ward, p. 56.

kin, Froude, Manning, Stanley, Church, and other eminent Victorians belonged. Of his dialectic Henry Sidgwick wrote in his *Recollections* that, "as far as he could recall, it was rivalled only by that of Huxley." In his great controversy with J. S. Mill, on the Freedom of the Will (carried on while Ward was editor of the Dublin Review), he certainly held his own; and Mill always expressed the highest admiration for his powers as a metaphysician. In 1865 Mill wrote to him: "I have never read anything of yours in which I have not found much more to sympathise with than to dislike, . . . the only opposition which I deem injurious to truth is uncandid opposition, and that I have never found yours to be, nor do I believe that I ever shall." And later, in 1867, "You are the clearest thinker I have ever met for a long time who has written on your side [the side of Theism] of these great questions."

Such was the great convert layman who taught theology in a Catholic seminary for about six years, with wonderful éclat. Though in after years such a doughty champion for Catholic truth, his aim as a Professor was to draw the minds of his students from mere controversy to the positive exposition of dogma, and especially to the method of pure reason followed by the great Scholastics. At the same time he had the greatest contempt for mere intellect as such. Cardinal Vaughan, who was at the time Vice-President of the College and was present officially at the Lectures, wrote of him:

"He was more like St. Augustine or some other of the Fathers teaching and haranguing on the doctrines of the faith, than like a mere intellectual schoolman." The Cardinal also remarks that he tore the very heart out of Suarez, Vasquez, and De Lugo, and that he consecrated his whole time in preparation for his lectures. Though the father of a family and a great landlord owning broad acres, and thus one who could have wielded much social influence and even political power, he contemned everything as a miserable bauble compared with the work, as he conceived it, of helping to form truly apostolic priests. The result of his intercourse with his class was the creation of an enthusiastic appreciation of theology, and harder work than had ever been previously known in the seminary.

In order to convey some idea how this very unusual arrangement grew up, and how it was all inspired by a truly mystical spirit of divine love, we will give the Professor's own words regarding his motives. It must be premised, however, that he was naturally reserved and had a strong sense of humour besides that well-known English dislike of religious effusiveness. This is well illustrated by a little anecdote given by his own daughter, who afterwards became a Dominican nun. She tried to get him to talk about spiritual things, asking what his favorite devotions were (though knowing this very well). He asked her

whether she was herself sublimely wrapt in ecstasy sometimes, and when she answered not, he said: "Well, if you think it an absurd question it is just the same for you to ask me such things. They are quite out of my line."

Though he had this horror of being thought pious, when it came to taking leave of his students, he could not refrain himself. He said, in a farewell address: "May God ever protect you from seeking any part of your rest and peace in the empty, delusive, and most unspiritualizing pleasures of mere intellectual excitement. It has been my very deep conviction of the fearfulness of this evil that has goaded me to put before you high lessons of spirituality, which are the only matters really worth the attention of an immortal being." He went on to say that he had forced himself to speak as he had on theological topics, while he had suffered most keenly from bitter self-reproach. Who was he that he should so speak to persons who had the heart to correspond with a noble vocation and looked forward to a career from which he would himself shrink in craven fear and despondency! "Had I succeeded in obtaining your interest in a purely intellectual view of that great science committed to my charge, I should have been your greatest enemy . . . I would rather engage in the most irksome and menial occupation that could be found than handle the sacred truths of theology in so vile and degrading a spirit."

These are strong words, but Ward had a habit of expressing himself emphatically. I shall now quote the impressions of one of his hearers.[1]

"What chiefly gained our hearts was his wonderful earnestness. He carried us away with him, and often we came out of his lecture as if we had been to a retreat sermon. His desire that we should carry to the poor the real substantial food of the Gospel, of doctrinal truth, won the love of all of us. He got quite moved to tears whilst with uplifted face to heaven he dwelt on their unfair position—the truth being unknown to them and nothing to gratify their propensions but sin. I must say a word on his personal love of God. I shall never forget the way in which he brought before us the Presence of God amongst us, and the ingratitude of forgetting One who, though our greatest benefactor, stood like a forgotten friend in the corner of the room. It came like an electric shock. Yet with all his power of conquest over us, he has told students that he often went to his lectures with fear and trembling, lest he should be a bore to us."

There was opposition to Ward and his methods of teaching, but it was overborne by Cardinal Wiseman, who procured for him from Pope Pius IX a Roman doctorate.

The above picture drawn by those who knew the Professor is that of a dogmatist softened by mysticism. It is not our intention to maintain that

[1] The Rev. Fr. Lescher of Notting Hill. *V. op. cit.*, p. 37.

such an example ought to be followed literally by all who wish to do the sort of task which he had undertaken. Ward had a saintly, but also a very peculiar personality—and neither Saints nor geniuses are to be imitated by ordinary people. But such an example, added to the greater ones which we previously described, may serve to emphasise the principle with which alone we are here concerned, that where theory and practice fall so far apart that they appear to be almost unrelated, we must not expect the best results. Our thesis is simple enough. If writers on mysticism would hold firmly by dogmatic truth, they would make a better impression upon their readers; and if theologians would throw a little more unction into their lectures neither they nor their hearers would lose anything of value.

CHAPTER II.

Mysticism and Natural Theology.

The term Natural Theology though in common use is one that is liable to be misunderstood, as though it referred to a branch of Theology proper. This is not the case. At least among Catholics there is a sharp distinction between Theology or the science of revealed truth, and philosophy which deals with truths acquired not through revelation but through natural reason. Both may be concerned with God and the things of God, but differently. By Natural Theology, then, is signified a branch of pure philosophy; it discusses the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being as made known to us by the light of nature and, so to say, prior to all supernatural revelation, *i. e.,* revelation which transcends natural reason. This distinction is of course fundamental, and it goes without saying that in Catholic schools of thought the contrast between these two spheres of knowledge is constantly borne in mind and adhered to with scrupulous fidelity.

As it is quite certain that mysticism belongs mainly to the supernatural sphere, it might seem at first sight that there is some inversion in a pro-

posal to open a discussion about it by considering its relation to natural rather than supernatural Theology. But there are in our view strong reasons for adopting this method. In the first place we may gain in clearness by merely indicating the contrast between the processes of reason and those of mysticism. But there is a more cogent reason. Although we fully recognise that Natural or Rational Theology is eminently non-mystical, and that in like manner mysticism must not be viewed mainly as a function of the natural intellect, yet the use of this faculty is postulated in mystical processes. The same faculties which reason about God in a philosophical way are also called into play by the mystic when he acquires by another method a different and, as Catholics believe, a higher knowledge of God. If we are seeking to arrive at an analysis of these mystical processes, surely it will be a useful preliminary to determine the character and limitations of those other processes which it is the aim of Natural Theology to describe. Not that we propose to discuss in detail the arguments and conclusions which Catholic philosophy claims to establish regarding the Divinity before the study of Theology proper can be suitably undertaken. The subject is one of large dimensions and is as difficult as it is of vital importance, and contains moreover problems which are subject of controversy even among its Catholic exponents, for which reason alone they would be avoided here.

But for our purpose it will be quite sufficient to indicate somewhat broadly the lines upon which Catholic philosophy proceeds in establishing its main conclusions about the existence and nature of God, and what is the view that it takes of our natural limitations in reasoning upon so sublime a subject.

Its process when reduced to the simplest terms is, we take it, something like the following. When we consult our primary sense-impressions we find that we are conscious of various forms of existence —ourselves and things outside of and distinct from our own being.[1] Passing these existing things under review, our intelligence reports that they have many excellencies or degrees of perfection, and if they are considered in their totality that they constitute a sort of hierarchy whether of beauty, utility or essential being. But in this world of existence nothing has been, or can from the nature of things, be discovered which is free from imperfection. The best of known objects are often the least permanent, and the more natural science progresses the more it everywhere speaks of changefulness and decay. Everything is known to be in movement, and movement implies a certain instability. Besides nothing is self-subsistent, one existence seems to flow from another and to be

[1] This objectivity of external existence cannot be demonstrated; neither does Catholic philosophy attempt to demonstrate it. It considers that to be true which is self-evident.

conditioned by it, as the oak springs from an acorn and the acorn from an oak.

Thus visible and living natures as soon as we begin to reason about them, help us, nay drive us, to conceive the idea of some existence, some standard of beauty and perfection, which is free from all the drawbacks which we find in ourselves and in the world around us. Without giving *directly* any suggestion that such an Absolute being as we call God exists, our mind certainly proclaims that in such an idea there is no logical, no palpable, inconsistency. Many Christian philosophers have laid hold of this statement, and have tried to press out of it even at the stage of thought indicated, a positive proof of God's existence. They maintain that the Idea of God postulates a corresponding reality, that no otherwise can we reasonably account for such a sublime conception but on the ground that it is a picture of something actual, something which has deliberately painted the picture in the human spirit.[1]

We are, however, far from admitting this argument as a satisfactory basis for such a serious proposition as the existence of God. Neither is it

[1] This was probably Plato's views of what he called the "Idea of Good," though it is not universally admitted that he positively identified that Idea with the Creator of the World. But we shall return to this question in a different context.

generally admitted by Catholic Philosophers [1] except as a presumptive reason, in which sense it may perhaps be allowed some considerable weight. But Catholic Philosophy, even when it does not jump at such a conclusion prematurely, supplies other lines of argument, some of which at least validly prove from reason and experience the existence of an Absolute Being, who is First Cause of all contingent existence as well as the Supreme Exemplar of all goodness, beauty and essence. Here again to discuss severally such methods of proof would take us too far afield, nor is any such dissertation necessary for our purpose. No Catholic philosopher does or can doubt that the doctrine of theism, as generally accepted by Christians, can be validly proved antecedently to any divine revelation; though the strength of the natural arguments may be reinforced by the fact of revelation. In fact, in the last held General Council, that of the Vatican, an anathema was pronounced against those who deny that God's existence can be established by natural reason;—but no statement was made as to the relative cogency of various possible lines of argument, and we refrain here from entering on their discussion.

This then is the position which we want to have clearly stated before we proceed to our enquiry regarding the mystical contemplation of the Divine Nature. We can naturally intue being, but not Absolute Being. We can naturally intue ob-

[1] See St. Thom., *Summa*, I^{a} II^{ae}, Art. I, 2.

jects of sense, all of which necessarily have imperfections or limitations; and by means of the very knowledge of these limitations we can arrive at a notion of the Perfect (and indirectly by our reasoning faculty we can assure ourselves that the Perfect has objective existence, that is, that the Idea of God has a corresponding Reality). But the point to observe is this:—how do we arrive at the Idea of God or the Absolute from our knowledge of inferior existences? Not, we repeat, directly, but by the removal of all imperfection, all contingency, all limitation, all mutability, from our notion of essence and existence.

Something new has emerged—a new idea; but note that it is not either direct or positive. That it is indirect is clear and obvious, but it is most important to note that it is also in some sense a negative idea. What does such an idea give to our mind as anything distinctive in its object, what does it tell us about God? Simply that He is *not* as we are ourselves, and *not* anything of which we have or can have experience. There is negation here.

But we must be very careful in regard to our nomenclature. This knowledge of God which can be acquired through natural reason is in some treatises called the Negative Idea of God, and the phrase may, we apprehend, be wrongly understood. We have tried to make it clear that it is impossible for us in our present condition to form to ourselves without some negative element, any notion of God

which is adequate even relatively to our faculties. But we must not permit ourselves to think that this or indeed any idea can be wholly negative. If such an idea could be formed, it would clearly be valueless. But more than this, the positive basis of our idea of God is of great moment, and it would be fatal to lose sight of it through a misapplied metaphysic. In the manifestation of his power and goodness the Maker of this world has done everything on such a grand scale that to many thinkers the Infinite appears to be lost in the Finite; and though Christians think differently, we must guard against the other extreme of underrating the positive side of our knowledge of God. The wonders of nature as revealed to the opening eyes of childhood do not diminish but are rather magnified as a maturer view of the universe is acquired by scientist, poet, or contemplative. On every side we become acquainted with phenomena which seem to suggest that there is somewhere hidden behind them a Reality which, though withdrawn from observation, must be practically without limit in its power and being. The sea at our first acquaintance with it strikes us as boundless as space, and the facts revealed by astronomy make the confines of our universe almost incredibly remote. Nor is this impression one of brute magnitude only. It is the fineness and perfection of nature which most strike delicate and imaginative minds like those of Plato, St. Augustine, Ruskin and all the poets. In created beauty it is not

merely the entrancing loveliness but the variety of forms each so supreme in its kind, which has ravished the spirit of mankind. And the disposition to regard the face of nature as the mirror of divine perfection is one entirely approved by the heart of Christian mysticism. The best writers on the perfections of God have always laid stress upon created beauty, not confining themselves to the things of sense, but specially directing us to the thought of moral and spiritual beauty, as revealed in the life of man. Even the triumphs of the human spirit in the spheres of politics, art, poetry, science, and music, are rightly regarded as ultimately attributable to the Being who devised and carried into execution the scheme of human life.

Therefore we repeat that there is a positive as well as a negative side to our knowledge of God. Taken by itself that positive knowledge will not work. No matter how sublime is our idea of the finite, it is quite incapable by itself of raising our mind to the level of the Infinite. This, if we may use a well-worn metaphor, is not in the same dimension. No amount of surface will give you heighth and depth, any more than any amount of pressure could bring oil out of grapes, or wine out of olives. It is here that the pantheism which is at the base of modern thought breaks down. It consists in the multiplication of finite things, heaping them up, pressing them down, letting them run over, and then labeling the complex as The Infinite. If indeed we could be satisfied to take a form of

megalomania and call it philosophy, then might Pantheists rejoice, for their problem is solved.

These modern thinkers when they deign to speak of their God, loudly proclaim that he is Immanent. The God of Christians is immanent certainly, for without his indwelling presence and power no finite being could even live or move or have its being. If it were not dependent upon the immanence of God it would be self-existent, and could indeed claim to be a little bit of God. But is this not nonsense? Where we find fault with pantheism and every other kind of materialistic philosophy is not because it claims an Immanent, but because it denies a Transcendent, God. When we give this attribute to the Supreme Being, we mean not merely that he transcends created things, taken severally or collectively, (for that is already imported by our positive knowledge of God through creatures)—but that, in virtue of his essence, he necessarily transcends in an infinite degree all that is finite and limited as such, therefore all that could be thought of as existing outside of himself whether it be actually called into existence or not.

Such then is the two-fold aspect of the knowledge of God which belongs to the science of Natural Theology. The Positive element is absolutely short of the reality, and gives by itself an inadequate idea. The Negative element is philosophically less inadequate, but all the same it is unsatisfactory to the rational person. Hence mysticism. For the Mystic is one who endeavours to

break through the limitations of philosophy, to pierce the veil that baffles his love of truth, to arrive at a more direct kind of knowledge of and communion with God than is attainable through the use of his own rationality. In order however to be in a position for discussing its relation to Mysticism we must say something further about Natural Theology. We have hitherto placed its conclusions in such an abstract light for the sake of making them clear, that perhaps we have not enabled the reader to grasp their full significance. In reality there need be nothing jejune about philosophy. Perhaps Professor James may be right when after quoting from Newman's *Idea of a University,* and declaring that it is "scholastic philosophy touched with emotion"—he adds, "every philosophy to be rightly understood should be touched with emotion." [1]

Let us see therefore how the principles we have indicated will work out in regard to any one of the Divine Attributes. For they hold good not merely as to the groundwork of our reasonable knowledge of God, but as to the further ramifications of what might truly be called Divine Philosophy. In every case therefore in which our reason endeavours to conceive an idea of a Divine Perfection, it must proceed both by the positive

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience,* p. 442. We shall have occasion directly to quote this work further, and to discuss Prof. James's own opinions about the value of scholastic philosophy.

and the negative method. Let it be question of the goodness of God, his love and his mercy for the creatures of his hand—or again of his immutable power, his independence of all that is contingent, his stern justice combined with intimate and penetrating knowledge of our inmost thoughts—or again of his holiness and brightness and surpassing beauty. In every case we must first enumerate all that we know or can think of a perfection as made known to us in the world (or among men if it is a moral perfection) by experience, or hearsay, or in reading, or even imagination. Every mind is different and has had different opportunities. The peasant is not as the poet, the sinner is not as the saint, the simple man is not as the scholar or the traveller or the statesman or the philosopher. But all men who have the use of reason can reach the knowledge of God in some degree, even apart from the help of revelation which must be entirely ruled out of our present discussion. Thus it becomes evident that the philanthropist who goes out of his way to confer temporal blessings upon his fellow-men may (even without directly intending it) help them in a religious sense by raising their estimate of human kindness and giving them material for thinking about God.

If such speculation about God went no further, the mind would arrive at some notion of a Divine Being, but it would be an anthropomorphic notion. This is the charge brought by modern materialists against Christians, Jews, and Theists generally—

that they worship an anthropomorphic Deity. Such a view if applied to Christian philosophy is most superficial. It is true that so long as we use the positive method only, we do argue from created things, and very often from human psychology, to the character of God. But this criticism leaves out of sight that our philosophy combines the Negative with the Positive argument. So far are Catholic thinkers from allowing the least taint of anthropomorphism to enter into their conceptions, that they positively refuse to predicate of God any one single human perfection in the human sense.[1] Our doctrine is that although we necessarily use the same phraseology to express divine and human beauty, virtue, wisdom, mercy, love, and the rest, yet the distance between the Absolute and the conditioned is so great, that these terms must always be understood merely in an analogous and not a truly identical sense. Even when we say God exists, we mean that he exists after a manner which is essentially different from the existence of anything that has been or could be created. Much more is the negative method necessary when it is a question of attributing to God moral and spiritual qualities like those we find in human character and action.

Thus when we have enumerated all that we can

[1] I am referring here to the Thomistic theory, which denies that even Ens is "univocum" as predicable of God and of creatures. See *Summa*, Ia Quaest. XIII. Art. 5. Most modern authorities and especially the Jesuits follow this doctrine.

know or think of human or created beauty and perfection—we go on to say this is all something inferior, relative, imitative, it has nothing to do with Absolute Being or Perfection, it is Not God. God is always and must always remain—as far as Natural Theology is concerned—beyond our real ken, beyond all the flights of our imagination, beyond our powers of mental intuition. We may call him good, but he is really Goodness; we may think of him as wise, he is really Wisdom; we may class him as immutable, he is really Immutability itself. The Psalmist tried to express this when he said.[1] "Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me; it is high and I cannot attain to it."

We shall not be able to account for the widespread tendency among men towards Mysticism, unless we thoroughly understand what can be, and what cannot be, reached by the ratiocinative faculty. The fact is reason tells us enough to whet our curiosity without being able to satisfy it. It appears to us a very mistaken view to regard mysticism as a sort of substitute for, or rival of, the reasoning faculty. Considering the question from the standpoint of sympathy with mysticism, we think it as fatal an error to underrate the power of reason as to exaggerate it. At the present day no doubt there is a marked tendency to treat logic as a disease of the mind—such a one is said to be "morbidly" logical. It is morbid indeed to overtax the logical faculty or to pretend that it has no

[1] Ps. CXXVIII, 6.

natural limitations. As Hamlet rightly says "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." But the other extreme of despising philosophy and especially the philosophy of God is, as we said, much more prevalent. As an extreme case of this lamentable scepticism I will here again quote from Professor James's really great book,[1] for it appears to me that his enquiry about the psychology of religion and especially mystical religion is undertaken in a sincere spirit, and that in spite of his marked limitations as to ideas and method, he really did some valuable service to the cause which (as I believe) he had at heart. He writes [2] in regard to the scholastic proof of the Divine attributes, strictly so-called as distinct from his moral attributes, "I think that even were we forced by a coercive logic to believe them, we should have to confess them to be destitute of all intelligible significance. Take God's Aseity, for instance, or his necessariness, his immateriality, his simplicity or superiority to the kind of inner variety or succession which we find in finite beings . . . his 'personality' apart from the moral qualities which it may comport; his relations to evil being permissive and not positive; his self-sufficiency, self-love, and absolute felicity in himself—candidly speaking how do such qualities as these

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lect. XVIII. On Philosophy.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 445.

make any connection with our life? And if they eventually call for no distinctive adaptations of our conduct, what vital difference can it possibly make to a man's religion whether they be true or false?"

Is not such a paragraph coming from a serious and fundamentally religious writer enough to make a reader gasp? Taken apart from the Professor's other statements we might conclude that he was not merely an atheist but a truculent one. Surely it should have been evident to such a penetrating mind as his (had it not been poisoned against logic when applied to religious faith) that it is absolutely impossible to worship God, to love him, nay even to believe in him, unless you know something about his metaphysical qualities, for instance what the writer calls his immateriality, his superiority to finite beings, his personality, his "relations to evil not being positive," his felicity, and the rest. How can you know these things (in the absence of revelation) without reasoning about them, and how can you reason about them without "logic?"

But the Professor attacks Catholic Philosophy on the ground that it is not universally accepted, at least by serious minded thinkers, that is, because its truth is not self-evident like that of mathematics and perhaps certain branches of physical science. But no Scholastic ever pretended that religious truth whether natural or revealed is self-evident. Professor James maintains that all men

first make up their mind about religion, as an elementary intuition, and then go to find reasons for their faith or unfaith. In this we believe him to be fundamentally right. As St. Anselm taught, "Non in dialecticâ solâ placuit Deo mundum salvum facere." Religious faith does not rest entirely upon philosophy but it may be more securely established by sound philosophy. Catholic teaching maintains not that Belief in God is necessarily founded upon philosophy, but that it is founded in some sense upon reason. If our critics maintain that philosophy is merely a way of methodizing convictions which are otherwise acquirable, we do not see any reason for quarrelling about it. The propositions of philosophy which we have enumerated are either true or false; if false reject them. Unfortunately Professor James wishes to reject them in any case. They stand self-condemned because they are "logical". Could any sentiment more deplorable be uttered by a Philosopher even who calls himself a Pragmatist?

We have thus attempted to give an outline of the sort of knowledge of God which can be attained by natural reason. As far as it goes it is good, but at best it could only bring an earnest enquirer to realize its inadequacy. The mind cannot rest in negative knowledge, and the information he receives from reason contains negation in its strongest form, though we have warned our readers against considering this knowledge as merely consisting of negation. Mysticism claims to offer a

higher kind of contemplation than mere ratiocination can afford; and that it satisfies, or at least aims at satisfying, a real human need is proved by the history of mankind. We shall touch upon the evidence for this statement in succeeding chapters; but it is hardly necessary to prove that men and women of all sorts and conditions, at all periods and in many different lands, have sought to lay hold upon God by a more or less definitely mystical approach. It is not enough to know that God transcends all their experience. They wish to include him among those things of which they have experience. They wish to fathom his nature, to hold converse with him, to draw him to themselves, or themselves to him.

CHAPTER III.

Natural Contemplation.

We are not yet to turn our attention to the true Mysticism of the Catholic religion. And even before giving some description of false and perverted mystics, another question arises. What are we to think of those souls—and surely there may be many—who though cut off from the light of Christian Faith have yet honestly sought communion with the God revealed to them by their own nature and by the world around? This question opens up vast avenues of interest and speculation, and it is the more difficult because it lies to some extent outside the beaten tracks of dogmatic theology which is entirely concerned with matters of revelation. We do not of course affirm that the questions we are about to raise are not to be considered in the light which dogmatic theology may supply; but that science can hardly claim that there is any direct revelation on the subject of God's methods of dealing with souls cut off from the light of faith. And we shall ask first, is there such a thing as natural contemplation, which is neither false nor perverted, but merely weak and inadequate; and secondly, what assistance is

offered by God's Providence to non-Christians who in good faith practise such mystic prayer?

Before considering this actual Contemplation of the Divinity, I should like to remind my readers how much of contemplation in a more general sense enters into human existence. I do not refer merely to learned persons, to poets, philosophers, artists and men of science who certainly spend much of their time in thought and in admiration at least of the things of sense. Think how many ordinary people lose themselves in what we call the love of nature, the wonders of heaven, of earth, or of the waters of the earth. Country folk who live quite normal lives push their hobbies so far that in addition to or sometimes by reason of their more active occupations, much of their interest in life consists in a sort of contemplation—which though not religious yet may contain some element of religion, some aspiration towards the Maker of all things. But more than this, I would lay stress upon that great factor in human life, the passion of love. When we say of a growing boy that he is the light of his father's eyes—we mean that his father's regard is so fixed upon his child that merely to see him present brings delight, wonder, and contentment. What of the mother—or what of the lover, the lover that is not all base, whose perhaps carnal passion is yet tinctured with a holier love? The true lover is a true contemplative also—in the beloved he sees or thinks that he sees ideal virtue and beauty and pure love. Is it any

exaggeration to say that a vast proportion of human beings are to some extent at least absorbed in contemplating that which they love, whether it be in nature or in art or in humanity itself?

I am very far from supposing that this kind of natural contemplation leads its votaries to anything approaching mysticism. That is not my argument, but I wish to make one solid principle as clear as I can—namely that when we speak of any sort of contemplation we do not refer to anything which is itself strange or alien from ordinary humanity. Our life truly consists of contemplation as it also consists of activity. These two things are not incompatible, neither "ex naturâ suâ" excludes the other. The contemplation of God may be and is a difficult thing, it may be a rare thing, but contemplation in some sort is of the very essence of human vitality. And to get a good grasp of this principle will help us in our enquiry about Divine Contemplation whether natural or supernatural.

In the present chapter we are not going to deal with any vague consciousness of God, even of His presence. We are not discussing religion as such, but mystical contemplation in its more complete form and in the strict meaning of the word. A man whether Christian or pagan can hardly be counted a contemplative unless he regularly and seriously devotes himself to this occupation, not indeed necessarily to the exclusion of all other occupations, but so that he ranks the knowledge and

love of God as his main business in life, or certainly not as a merely secondary affair.

We have seen that our human faculties are capable of acquiring some true knowledge and love of God through natural channels, and no one doubts that many who are deprived of the Faith may often try to love and serve God as revealed through nature, at least by way of transient acts of the soul, which need not imply any serious and persistent effort to carry meditation to its utmost limits. But this is not quite to our point, and we must go further. There is to be taken into account the very patent difficulty of practising contemplation in the full sense. It certainly implies keeping the attention fixed upon God in a way that is impossible except to those who are disciplined by a long and arduous process, in and through which all the faculties of the soul are forced to withstand all external distraction, and what is worse the rebellion of the senses and the imagination against prolonged prayer. We know that with all the helps offered to Christians by divine grace they find contemplation very difficult. Are we to believe that those who are deprived (even though not by their own fault) of revelation are yet enabled to concentrate their faculties upon the God of nature so as to acquire a real gift of natural contemplation somewhat analogous to the gift of the mathematician or the astronomer?

This question is emphatically not one of theory. A question about matters of fact can be properly

decided only by the verdict of history and the appeal to fully attested observation. But if we find sufficient reasons for giving even tentatively an affirmative answer, we will permit ourselves also reverently to ask whether we can find any light from reason or faith as to the position of such natural contemplatives, or their relation to the true God.

And here we must make a proviso. We are seeking to distinguish between mystical systems which are essentially superstitious and bad and those which are according to right reason and therefore, as we may presume, not wholly unpleasing to God though not fully pleasing to Him as divorced from true Faith.[1] Where the true Faith is wanting, there must be some tendency to error and superstition, so weak is the unassisted reason of mankind. Our position then is that a certain admixture of theological error, a certain disposition towards beliefs or practices which are in themselves superstitious, need not wholly vitiate contemplative prayer, provided always that its motive be pure and its substance not perverted or tainted with immorality. God looks to the heart; and Christ said "If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light." [2]

We have permitted ourselves therefore to assume

[1] Thus we understand the statement in the Epistle to the Hebrews "Without Faith it is impossible to please God." Heb. XI. 6.

[2] Matt. VI. 22.

that among the adherents of false religions, there have been at all times souls who endeavoured to serve God according to their lights, and to put their faculties to a good use in regard to religion. It would be quite another matter to assert without further proof that among such well-meaning persons a number have been true contemplatives, or even that it is possible to contemplate the Divinity assiduously by the light of reason only and as it is revealed in the natural universe. But we do feel free to maintain that, in case such natural contemplatives exist even though their minds may not be entirely clear of superstitious beliefs—provided these do not entirely pervert their intellect and will—then we may securely conclude that such prayer as far as it goes is a good thing, suitable to the condition in which such persons are placed, and pleasing to God in the sense in which all good faith is usually regarded by Catholics as pleasing to God.

Some Catholic writers [1] appear to assume that, if we can point to cases of genuine contemplation among non-Christians, then we shall assume that their prayer is by some mysterious dispensation on a level with that of Catholics; in other words that it is strictly and theologically speaking a supernaturally infused prayer. The possibility of such cases is not denied by Theologians; if we required an instance of a gentile who was elevated to super-

[1] See *Mysticism, its True Nature and Value*, A. B. Sharpe, p. 156.

natural grace, the case of Job might be naturally cited.[1] But our enquiry does not relate merely to a few cases of those on whom God may have chosen to confer exceptional favours. We are thinking rather of masses— perhaps large masses, but we cannot hope to know their extent—of human kind. That God exercises some fatherly care and Providence not merely over the material laws of nature but much more over those beings whom he has endowed with intelligence and free will hardly requires demonstration. From such a belief it will follow that if human beings use their faculties to gain an intimate knowledge of the Deity, and if their minds and hearts are centred in a serious and persistent effort to study and to conform themselves to His essential being and attributes, then at least a natural Providence will be exercised in their behalf in God's own way and perhaps according to certain fixed laws. For without elevating them to that supernatural state which it is of faith that Christians enjoy, without enlightening them by a special revelation or endowing them with any faith that is essentially supernatural, it is easy for him in his ordinary Providence to confer upon their natural faculties certain helps in their own order, that is, an increase of strength and stability; and possibly special opportunities such as are suited to

[1] The prevailing view that the book of Job is literature but not history will hardly prevent Catholics from using it as an illustration of an important principle in regard to divine action. In any case it is inspired literature.

their temperament and condition for exercising their faculties upon an object which is connatural to their innate capacity. To deny even the possibility of such a natural enlightening and strengthening of what is best in human nature without at the same time elevating it to beyond its connatural ambit, would be a very gratuitous limiting of the power or of the goodness of the Creator. Besides theologians constantly assume that if we had been all created in a state of nature and not with any ultimate view of our supernatural elevation, and the kind of beatitude which belongs to the same,—then God would have certainly provided some such natural aids to virtue and to contemplation as we have been assuming in the case of natural contemplatives, provided any such exist.

It is our contention, indeed, that such persons, even though they are members of a race which has fallen short of the elevation provided for it, are yet *de facto* in the same condition, as regards their effort to pray assiduously and practise divine contemplation, as they would have been had not opportunity for a supernatural life been offered to the human race. In other words the Fall of Man has indeed deprived such persons of a higher series of graces, but does not necessarily [1] deprive them of what is due to their natural faculties according to the will of a kind and merciful Creator and Master.

When we come to apply the above principles to

[1] Always under the condition that they are not voluntarily outside the influence of Revelation.

the concrete instances which we know from history, the matter, of course, becomes complicated and difficult, and will give conclusions which must be regarded as tentative at least as regards individuals. Those whom we shall discuss are men who appear to have practised a sort of natural mysticism, free, so far as we can tell, of gross or corrupting influences such as we shall have to consider in another chapter.

We naturally commence with what is nearer to ourselves, the religion and devotion of the West, where we are brought at once into contact with Greek life and thought. The debt of Christianity to various forms of Platonism at least from the time of St. Augustine onwards, has been so enormous that it is almost difficult to regard Hellenic Mysticism (using the word now in a somewhat extended sense) as opposed to that of the Catholic system. Yet it is necessary so to regard it. We do not, of course, mean to deny that there is a certain psychological element common to pagan and Christian contemplation. But, without anticipating what we shall say later as to the relation between Catholic Mysticism and Divine Faith, no Catholic would doubt for one instant that all prayer among us belongs essentially to the supernatural order. On the other hand, Plato, of course, could base only upon natural reason his belief in that spiritual world of beauty and of eternal truth which according to his philosophical system culminated in the absolute Good as the highest Reality.

This Platonic view of the spiritual world involved according to its author a really mystical view of religion and of life. For Plato taught dogmatically that happiness, which is the end of life, consists in the contemplation of absolute beauty,[1] and he perpetually harps upon not merely the sight of, but communion with "a Beauty which is pure and unalloyed." The doctrine of Erôs or the love of God is enucleated as follows:[1]

"And he who hath been carried to this point in the education of Erôs, suddenly shall he behold, O Socrates, that wondrous fair nature for the sake of which all his toil hath been thus far undergone, which is in the first place eternal, having neither birth nor death, increase nor decrease; nor is sometimes fair and sometimes not, to one fair and to another not, nor in one part fair and in another not; nor shall any fair thing be like unto it, neither face nor hands nor other parts, nor hath body any part in it, nor speech, nor science; but beauty absolute, unchanging in its form, while it also gives some participation of itself to everything else which is beautiful. Thus the true method of Erôs is to rise from the knowledge of beautiful forms, as by steps in a ladder, to the knowledge of beautiful deeds, and then to beautiful ideas, till finally we arrive at the idea of Absolute Beauty, and learn at last in what the true essence of beauty consists."

Unfortunately we do not know sufficient of the

[1] *Symp.*, 211 D.
[2] *Ibid.*, 210 A.

details of Plato's life, his private life, to be able to state definitely that he devoted his time to contemplative prayer as distinct from merely a calm and philosophic view of abstract truth; yet one has only to acquire some sympathetic knowledge of the Dialogues to conclude that the author's bent was towards a sound though natural mysticism. There is a passage in the Timæus [1] which implies a sense of almost Christian reverence towards the Deity. "It is difficult to find the Creator and Father of this universe, but still quite impossible when you have found him to speak of him before all people." This attitude absolves us from the need of entering upon the controversial question whether Plato fully identified his Summum Bonum, the "Idea of the Good," with the Divinity as an Efficient Cause. The sentiment we have quoted is more clearly stated in an Epistle attributed to Plato,[2] where the author says:

"I have never written nor will attempt to write a full account of the Idea of Good, although I believe I could do it better than anyone else. But the matter is scarcely capable of expression."

It is fundamentally Plato's deep religious spirit, taken along with his human and robust love of

[1] P. 28, C.

[2] Ep. VII. Burnet, followed by Dean Inge, admits the authenticity of this Epistle. On the other hand, Zeller rejects all the Epistles, and it might not be safe to argue from them regarding philosophical questions. But this matter touching the spiritual temper of the philosopher is one on which we may consider the Epistle as fairly good evidence.

natural beauty, which has cast such a spell over the minds of men and above all of Christians. We can hardly think of any poet (or shall we say Saint?) who had a more enthusiastic love of spiritual beauty, with which he, of course, identified all higher truth. Thus he has contributed immensely to the growth of mysticism throughout the ages, and on the principle that "no man giveth what he hath not got," we can scarcely hesitate to class him among natural contemplatives.[1] There is evidence in some sort supplied by Plato himself of a contemplation which resulted in a kind of ecstacy. In the Dialogue from which we have quoted [2] it is related that his own master, Socrates, was watched by a large crowd standing fixed in thought for a whole day, and that when night came on, some Ionians continued to watch him remaining in the same position until morning dawned. "He then offered prayer to the Sun and went his way." We are not however told whether this prolonged meditation was on a religious subject, but it appears probable that it was. His prayer is described as though it were superstitious, but we may take that statement with some reserve.

But to return to Plato himself, we may say that to know him intimately is to love him, and no

[1] Some Christian writers have maintained that Plato must have received some anticipatory knowledge of the Faith through a personal revelation. We view this idea as unfounded and quite unnecessary.

[2] See p. 220.

lover could doubt of his sincerity and goodness in the order of nature. Even where we must rank his metaphysic as false and his ethical ideas as pernicious, our fidelity to the man remains unshaken, for there is no Platonic utterance but rings with simplicity and manliness. This is not understood by those who are merely acquainted with some of his bizarre opinions. We may quote from a brilliant passage of A. W. Benn,[1] with whose views we are in general agreement. "Not such does Plato now appear to the popular imagination, but as a mystical enthusiast, a dreamer of dreams, which whether they be realized or not in some far-off sphere, are at any rate out of relation to the world of sensuous experience and everyday life. But Plato believed in truth and right and purity, believed in them still more profoundly than Plotinus, and his was a more effectual faith because he did not share the sterile optimism of his Alexandrian disciple, but worked and watched for the realization of what as yet had never been realized."

This extract, by comparing Plato with Plotinus, will form a natural transition to what we have to say about Neo-platonic philosophers of the third century A. D., through whom St. Augustine was brought to the study of Platonism. But before taking them up, we should like to make a short reference to Plato's greatest disciple. If we compare Aristotle with his master, especially upon his temperamental side, we might be scarcely inclined

[1] *The Greek Philosophers*, Vol. II, p. 352.

to rank him among the mystics. It has been well remarked, however, that the philosophy of Aristotle, contrasted though it may be with Plato's, yet is strongly idealistic in its own way. Rationalist though he undoubtedly was, yet his theism was fully developed, and he had no leanings towards what we call empiricism. But our theme is not concerned with philosophy directly: the question for us is this— Did Aristotle, like Plato, incline towards natural contemplation? All we can say on this is that he ranked the knowledge and contemplation of God as the highest perfection to which man can attain. "God himself is pure 'Ενεργεία," which he distinctly states is contemplation, and he adds "of human activities that which is most akin to this is also most blessed." [1] It is true that with ordinary men theory and practice are not always in agreement, but then Aristotle was not an ordinary man.

On the other hand, when we turn to Plotinus, the case is very different. His own writings and his biographer leave us no room for doubt as to his formal and assiduous practice of mystical prayer. Though it is in a sense unfortunate for him to have his name almost inevitably coupled with that of Plato, yet he is not unworthy to be mentioned along with the Master. He was not merely an interesting personality, but in a subordinate sense a great thinker. Nothing is more noticeable in regard to modern thought, especially in

[1] *Eth. Nic.*, *X*, viii, 7.

England, than the revived interest shown in Neoplatonism. Several works of first rate importance have appeared within the last few decades. However, Benn's book on Greek Philosophy, which we have quoted, came out as early as 1882, when he wrote of Plotinus:[1] "No other thinker has ever accomplished a revolution so immediate, so comprehensive, and of such prolonged duration: Neoplatonism simply annihilated every school of philosophy to which it was opposed . . . To have revived the spiritualism of Plato and Aristotle in such a way as to win for it universal acceptance, was precisely its greatest merit. It is the only one that he would have claimed for himself. Although Aristotelian ideas abound in his writings, still not only are they over-balanced by the Platonic element, but Plotinus might justly have contended that they also belong in a sense to Plato."

Hence we need offer no apology for giving attention to this non-Christian mystic and even to his system of philosophy. In following our remarks we hope the reader will bear in mind that in a sense Plato and Plotinus stand at the beginning and the end of a great and fertile epoch of European thought, extending over many centuries. If we are right in maintaining that these men were true contemplatives (though beset with the limitations of a merely human reason), it would be unscientific to suppose that they were merely individual exceptions without relation to the mass of

[1] *Loc. cit.*, Vol, II, p. 350.

men. Their influence in the speculative order was too great to allow any doubt that in any form of spirituality to which they attained they had innumerable partners in their adventure. In discussing the mysticism of Plato and Plotinus, we are putting the mentality of the West to a crucial test.

As a modern witness of the importance of Plotinus' philosophy we may quote from Harnack, who wrote:[1]

"The historical importance of Neo-platonism lies in the fact that it represents a stage in the history of religion." Though not an enthusiast for Greek philosophy, the eminent divine added, "its influence on the history of our ethical culture has been and still is immeasurable, above all because it begot the consciousness that the only blessedness which can satisfy the human heart must be higher than the sphere of reason." If this statement is a true one, it follows that Neoplatonism is not merely mystical, but that it involves the deepest root of all mysticism.

The Dean of St. Paul's, in his great work on Plotinus,[2] though he finds fault with Harnack's attitude, yet seems to corroborate the sentiment we have quoted when he says:[3] "We should misconceive the whole character of Plotinus and his circle if we did not recognise that the intellectual

[1] In the *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. XVII, Article on "Neoplatonism."
[2] *The Gifford Lectures* for 1917–18, 2 Vols., 1918.
[3] Vol. II, p. 128.

discipline was subsidiary to holiness of life. The main object of Plotinus was to bring back souls to 'their heavenly Father.' The philosopher himself lived the life of a saint. Austerely simple in his habits, though without any harsh asceticism, he won all hearts by his gentle and affectionate nature and his sympathy with all that is good and beautiful in the world." And earlier he wrote:[1] "Plotinus must be for all time the classical representative of mystical philosophy. No other guide even approaches him in power and insight and spiritual penetration. I have steeped myself in his writings and have tried not merely to understand them, but to take them as a guide to right living and right thinking . . . He not only attempts to unite and reconcile what was best in all Greek philosophy, but claims to have found the way of salvation and deliverance for the soul of man. And, as he is never tired of telling us, we can only understand him by following him and making his experience our own."

Lastly, in Vol. II, p. 227, in a warmer tone of enthusiasm than we might have expected in a dean, he exclaims: "We cannot preserve Platonism without Christianity, nor Christianity without Platonism, nor civilization without both!"

Before attempting to convey to our readers any notion of the mysticism of Plotinus we must, therefore, endeavor to define his attitude towards Platonism. It must be understood that Plato's own

[1] *Ib.*, p. 7.

method was dynamic,—that is he was occupied in throwing a quivering flash-light upon reality rather than in formulating propositions about it. But Aristotle had also made his contribution to many problems; and since his day centuries of discussion in the schools of Athens, Alexandria, and Rome, had made it possible to restate the philosophy of ideas in a more stable and consistent form than Plato himself had ever achieved. But Plotinus was too great to be a mere eclectic: he was an original thinker. In certain ways not unlike the great master, besides being intensely logical, he was by nature intuitive, and he even outstripped Plato in the transcending of empirical and rational methods. The weakness and yet the strength also of his philosophy lies in its entire dependence upon psychological facts. Plato was, owing to his finer outlook upon the external world, less exclusively mystical than was Plotinus. Under Socratic influence Plato, it is true, had risen from the contemplation of phenomena to that of eternal ideas, and from these to the Idea of Good,—but had apparently hesitated to identify the latter with the First Cause in the order of efficiency. To his mind, as to many modern thinkers, it was impossible to conceive of the Absolute as Creator or Father without depriving the idea of its inherent unity and immutability.

This was also the problem that confronted Plotinus, and his method of solving it was to distinguish within the Godhead, three degrees of abstrac-

tion or elevation which he named "Hypostases," the Soul, the Intellect, and the "One" (or the "Good").[1] Of these the Soul was the creator of sensible things; the Intellect of the ideal world; the One (or the Good) was Absolute and beyond all being.[2] It is an essential part of the system that our faculties are graded proportionately; that is, we have Sense (αἴσθησις), which can apprehend phenomena, Reason (διανοία), which can apprehend ideas, and a still higher supra-rational faculty Intuition, (νόησις), which alone can apprehend the Absolute. Without attempting any criticism of these philosophical notions (and their shortcomings from the Christian standpoint are at once discernible), we must point out that the Neoplatonic theory of cognition is remarkably suited to the exigencies of mysticism. However they explain it, all exponents of mystical prayer must agree in positing some supra-rational faculty by which they attain to a knowledge of God. It is

[1] If these Hypostases are taken inversely, it is easy to discern some analogy with the Three Persons of the Christian Trinity. As Plotinus was undoubtedly acquainted with Christian doctrine, many have attempted to account for the Neoplatonic Hypostases by Christian influence. But there is no historical evidence for this theory; and the question might be raised whether, in pre-Athanasian days, the doctrine of the Trinity could have been prominent enough to loom largely in the eyes of Greek philosophers. At a later date the influence was the other way, as we shall see.

[2] This Hypostasis could alone, as regarded in itself, be equated with our idea of God, and yet it is by no means adequate as a basis for Theism.

from this point of view that we would try to explain Plotinus, whose mysticism is certainly expressed in sublime language. Before, however, giving the reader a specimen of his writing, it is only fair to quote the following passage from Benn.[1]

"In estimating the intellectual character of Plotinus, we must also remember that the theory of the Absolute One occupies a relatively small space in his speculation; while at a rough computation, the purely mystical portions of his writings,—by which we understand those in which allusion is made to personal and incommunicable experiences of his own,—do not amount to more than one per cent. of the whole. If they have attracted more attention than all the rest put together, the reason probably is that they afford an agreeable relief to the arid scholasticism which fills so much of the *Enneads,* and that they are the only very original contribution made by Plotinus to Greek literature." [2]

We may now give an extract from the last of the *Enneads* [3] as a practical illustration of the Neoplatonic mysticism.

"How can discursive thought apprehend the absolutely simple? It is enough to apprehend it by intuition (νοερῶς). But in this apprehension we

[1] *Loc. cit.*, Vol II, p. 314–5.

[2] We consider this opinion worth quoting, though we are aware that the last statement is open to question.

[3] *Enn.*, VI, Chaps. 7 and 9 (tr. by Inge.)

have neither the knowledge nor the power to say anything about it. We may believe that we have really seen, when a sudden light illumines the soul; for this light comes from the One and is the One. And we may think that the One is present, when like another god, he illumines the house of him who calls upon him; for there would be no light without his presence. Even so the Soul is dark that does not behold him; but when illumined by him, it has what it desired, and this is the true end and aim of the soul, to apprehend that light, and to behold it by that light itself, which is no other than the light by which it sees. For that which we seek to behold is the light which gives us light, even as we can only see the sun by the light of the sun. How then can this come to us? Strip thyself of everything (ἄφελε πάντα)."

And again:[1]

"If a man sees himself become one with the One, he has in himself a likeness to the One, and if he passes out of himself as an image to its archetype, he has reached the end of his journey. And when he comes down from his vision, he can again awaken the virtue that is in him, and seeing himself fitly adorned in every part he can again mount upward through virtue to spirit, and through wisdom to God. Such is the life of gods and of godlike and blessed men; a liberation from all earthly bonds, a life that takes no pleasure in earthly things, a flight of the alone to the Alone."

[1] Enn., V, 3.

This is certainly reminiscent of Plato, but it also strongly suggests the mystical union of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. It is important to notice that there is nothing here to suggest ecstasy in a physical sense, or anything abnormal. Plotinus tells us, however, and his biographer Porphyrius confirms it, that three or four times in his whole career he arrived at a higher state of union with God than was ordinary. The meaning of this must be obscure. As Catholics mystics would hardly think it possible that the prayer of union as understood by them could be reached in a state of nature—we must perforce conclude that at least the beginnings of physical ecstasy must be probably intended. But it would be a mistake to dogmatise on points of detail.

Miss E. Underhill in her brilliant study of Pagan and Christian Mysticism [1] is, we think, inclined to underrate the spirituality of Plotinus. Although she has no leaning towards Catholicity or any dogmatic system of Faith (being apparently a pure Modernist), her sympathy is entirely with the Catholic mystics, and the object of her work is to show their superiority over the Neoplatonist and other non-Christian schools. For us Catholics there need be no straining of arguments to assure ourselves that true Christian mysticism is on a higher plane both spiritually and psychologically from that of the merely natural contemplative. If we thought it necessary here to insist on the

[1] *The Mystic Way* (London), 1913.

huge chasm that undoubtedly exists between pagan and Christian prayer, we should turn not to Miss Underhill for all her merits, but to a much greater authority, no less than St. Augustine himself. In giving the history of his own conversion he has occasion to contrast the doctrines of Plotinus with those of the Christian Evangelist. Though treating the former with respect and admitting that the study of the Neoplatonists had proved a distinct landmark in his own journey towards the Faith, he draws a striking and eloquent contrast between Plotinus and the prelude to the Fourth Gospel, making clear for all time the essential contrast between the half-lights of human reason and the clear radiance of revealed truth.

Neither does it concern us very vitally to discuss the influence exerted by the mysticism of the Greeks upon the early scholastics, of writers of Christian Mysticism such as the Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, or even St. Bonaventure. Those who study these questions for the first time may be startled to find how strong are the signs of such influence, and will learn how fine is the line dividing the natural from the supernatural. We need not wonder that Catholics have been over prone to assume supernatural revelation as the only explanation of prayer like that of Plotinus. To cut the Gordian knot is an easy thing.

We have already stated our belief that heavenly assistance connatural to the intrinsic needs of the human spirit should be postulated in the case of

all who seek in good faith to know and love the God of Nature. Even though it be easy for the natural man to acquire through his faculties an ordinary knowledge of God, how far is this from the serious effort of the contemplative! To realize this we have only to remember how rare is mystical contemplation among those who have a profound and intimate knowledge of God as revealed in the Catholic religion. And why is it that so many nominal Christians pray not at all, while some pagans have spent their lives in adoring Him? But our business now is not to discuss the paradoxes of the human spirit;—we are merely looking at known facts and seeking for some probable explanation of them. Where all is mysterious, and we have no divine warranty for our conclusions, we must be satisfied if we can arrive at a fair working hypothesis which is neither inconsistent with our facts nor opposed to the principles of faith.

But before reverting to theological speculation something must be added upon the problems presented by the religion of the Orient, most of which are, of course, more or less steeped in mysticism. We are not aware, though we have made enquiry, of any attempt to treat this subject as a whole. Vast as it is, we think it deserves some careful attention on the part of Christian thinkers. We intend to restrict our own remarks mainly to the religions of India, including Buddhism, which is a

product of the Hindu mind. It is hardly necessary to add that as well as other monotheistic systems Mohammedanism presents features which might well claim our attention. But with regard to the latter its comparative lateness and consequent contamination with Judaistic and Christian doctrine reduces its usefulness for our purpose: besides formal mysticism is really alien to its true spirit. The Prophet expressly declared: "No monks in Islam: the holy war is the monasticism of Islam." And writing on the subject of Sufism, Fr. Edmund Power, S. J., remarks: [1]

"Originating in Syria, no doubt largely through Christian influence, the movement spread eastwards, gathering strength and assimilating native elements in India, and especially in Persia, where it was first organized. Its mystic element, ecstatic union and self-annihilation in the Divinity, was borrowed partly from Neo-Platonic philosophy, partly from Veda Pantheism and Buddhist Nirvâna. Though Sufism fostered an interior religious spirit, opposed alike to the fanaticism of the warrior and the strife and hair-splitting of the ritualists and dogmatists, and numbered not a few noble souls in its ranks,[2] it led more generally to

[1] *History of Religions*, Vol. I, p. 29.

[2] We might refer here to the autobiography of the great Sufi Al-Ghazzali, who flourished in the 11th century. See Art. by D. B. MacDonald in the *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. XX. It is a most fascinating and illuminating document by apparently a saintly man.

excessive pride, Pantheistic beliefs, and the destruction of moral order. The dervishes founded in the twelfth century are its modern representatives—"choicest vagabonds from every nation of Islam" Burton calls his dervish companions. There are howling, turning, and dancing dervishes, names sufficiently characterising religious exercises in which reason is dethroned by fancy, and asceticism and piety become jugglery and extravagance."

Thus there is less hope of finding here instances of pure natural contemplation than in the older religions which have organized communities of monks and nuns, or at least official systems of contemplative prayer.

India has always exercised a special fascination for students of religion. Nothing can be more mysterious than its dark contrasts, where we find closely jostling each other coarse and often degrading superstition and sublime speculation about the things of God. Even those who have used their opportunities to get into some degree of personal touch with Indian religion, find it a baffling theme, and the more they know about it, the more they hesitate to express definite views as to its real inwardness. Even the educated Hindu has been heard to express surprise that we Europeans should attempt to understand his mind, for he cannot himself feel sure about it. Therefore, we

would wish our readers to be alive to the danger of formulating conclusions about Indian religion on the part of those who, like ourselves, have no intimate or first hand knowledge of the Indian people.

On the other hand, the literature on the subject is immense, some of it written by men who, like the Abbé Dubois in the early 19th century, lived among the people and made a serious study of their mind and institutions. The Jesuits in particular, from the time of Xavier, have been foremost as Catholic missioners in India and have frequently been closely in touch with the people; and thus it has been possible for me (without in any way pretending to be an authority) to avail myself of some useful information from the Catholic standpoint of French, Belgian, and Italian missioners. I have also made a few enquiries as to the views of English and Irish Protestant missioners about modern mysticism among the Brahmans.

To commence with its philosophical presuppositions, Hinduism, as presented in the Vedânta, is certainly pantheistic. But this is a very elastic term. It may be a thin cloak for the nakedness of materialism or it may be closely akin to Christian theism. Cousin denied that he was a pantheist; and many attempts have been made to accommodate Spinoza with Christianity. Both these great thinkers were immensely indebted to the systems of the East: the former called it the

cradle of the human race and "the native land of the highest philosophy." [1] The German leaders of thought have been even more enthusiastic in their admiration of Sanskrit literature and philosophy. Schlegel wrote: [2] "The early Indians possessed a knowledge of the true God, all their writings are replete with sentiments and expressions as deeply conceived and reverentially expressed as in any human language in which men have spoken of their God."

And Max Muller, quoting Schopenhaur to the effect that "in the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as the Upanishads; it has been the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death" adds,[1] that, as the result of his own experience during a long life, he believes that in the way of philosophy nothing could be a better preparation for a happy death than a study of the Vedânta.

One thing must strike the casual student of the doctrine of Brahmă and that is its extraordinary affinity to the Neo-platonist view of the Divinity. It is no wonder that attempts have been made to father the latter upon Brahmanism: but the best Hellenists are not convinced—the natural evolution of Neo-platonism from earlier Greek systems being too apparent, to say nothing of historical objections against Indian influences upon a large

[1] Lectures at Paris, 1828–9, Vol. I, p. 32.
[2] *Indian Language, Literature and Philosophy*, p. 471.
[3] *The Vedânta Philosophy*, 1894, p. 8.

scale over the later Greek mind. But undoubtedly Plotinus was in India, and that for several years.[1]

The twofold object of Brahman contemplation is (1) to extricate the Soul from subjection to the world of sense and of passion, and (2) to become absorbed in Brahmă, which is ultimate Divinity, but as stripped of all unthinkable attributes. The most succinct and satisfactory account I have found of this subject is given by L. de la Vallée Poussin, Professor of Ghent University and a thorough Catholic.[1]

In this work he quotes largely from Professor P. Deussen, of Berlin University, and considers that, as pure description, the account of the most coherent and at the same time widely-spread school of Brahman mysticism is the best thing which Deussen has written. (See page 93, footnote.)

The main idea running through Brahmanism seems to be that the true end of man (and therefore of prayer) is Deliverance. This can be fully obtained only by absorption in Brahmă. Beneath the Divinity so conceived is Brahmă, the highest conception of God as the object of religious worship in the ordinary sense. Of this inferior God alone can attributes (including existence) and any sort of activity or volition be predicated. He is the Soul of the world and is also identified with the

[1] For this question, which is, however, not very important for our enquiry, see W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I, p. 82.

[2] *Le Brahmanisme* (*Histoire des Religions:* Blond et Cie.).

human self. All desire, feeling, taste, all sensible perfection really belongs to him alone; the moon and the sun are his eyes, the wind is his breath, he is at once the light of heaven and the light of the heart. While ordinary religion deals with this lower divinity, in order to reach the highest Brahmă it is necessary to be a contemplative. It is for this reason that the life of the true Brahman divides itself into four periods:—

1°. In the first, the Life of the Novice, are acquired the necessary virtues of chastity and obedience to the law, viewed as a stage of asceticism by which man begins to be generally purified from earthly attachment and becomes capable of return to his true Fatherland.

2°. The Life of the Master of the House, in which he will practise marital chastity only. These two degrees are necessary for all, and for salvation: on them society is based and they are required for the welfare of the world.

3°. The next stage, which is contemplative, may come when a man is white and wrinkled and has seen the son of his own son. He retires, with or without his wife, with or without the essential rites of sacrifice, to live the life of an anchorite in the forest. He is called Forester and devotes his time to austerity and silent meditation.

4°. The Life of the Perfectly Renounced (known as Sannyâsin) is the final stage. Here a man must leave his wife and be quite alone: he will usually become homeless and a mendicant.

It must be understood that these rules which are theoretically in force at the present day, represent but one particular phase of Brahmanism, and would not have been always regarded as orthodox, for they seem to depress the importance of ritual religion, and have sprung from philosophical tendencies which produced the heresies of Jainism and Buddhism. As a formula they seem to merit our commendation; but it is our task to discover how they work out in practice. We must ask, what kind of contemplation we may believe them capable of producing.

It seems difficult to conclude that from a human system apparently well devised no good fruits can accrue. If there are among the Brahman contemplatives, men of good faith and relative enlightenment, is it possible that none of them arrive at a state of prayer proportionate to the effects which they make, which must certainly be very great?

No reply to this question can be of any real avail which is not based upon a knowledge of actual facts. Reliable testimony is difficult to acquire, and when you get it, is most conflicting. Some students of Hindu life speak enthusiastically about the higher faith and prayer of the Brahmans; others tell you it is almost invariably a crass compound of superstitious fanaticism and mental aberration. Among Jesuit missioners whom I have met or corresponded with, there are those who esteem the Brahman philosophy, and it may be that their views as to its practical effect are founded too

much upon logic and not enough upon experience. The most reliable of these witnesses whom I could consult personally is a French Jesuit who has lived thirty-two years on a mission in Southern India, where he has been in charge of a large college, mainly consisting of Brahman pupils, with whom he has lived on terms of intimacy and affection. He spoke highly of these boys, without concealing the weak points in their character and conduct. He has known several Sannyâsin, including the father of one of his boys, and several others with whom he had come into contact. Even the boys themselves had sometimes shown inclination towards religious fervor of the same type; he also knew of the Rajah of Cochin, who had retired (leaving his kingdom to the nephew who now governs it), in order to devote himself entirely to religious exercises. Yet this Father has no faith whatever in the mental prayer of these people. They must put themselves under a "guroo" (or director), who will instruct them in the ritual and the meditation which they must follow. I regret to add that my informant opines that the whole effect of these practices is merely an inane sort of mental apathy induced by self-suggestion, which leads to partial or complete insanity and has no reference whatever to any sound contemplation of the Deity. This view is the only one he could base on his personal experience, but he had not given particular attention to the matter. He did not strike me as being in any way prejudiced, and ex-

pressly stated that he did not deny the possibility that his experience was one-sided and unfortunate. The number of educated men who devote themselves to a life of asceticism is naturally diminishing with the spread of European ideas and standards of life in India.

On the other hand I met another witness who had a much wider as well as a longer experience than the Jesuit missioner. This was a Civil Servant, not a Catholic, who had been in every province of the country except one, and had, besides, a considerable knowledge of Burmah. He has the highest opinion of the Brahman religion when at its best, and stated that he had known in the remoter parts of Northern India, particularly the mountainous regions, several instances of very genuine devotees, who practically gave their whole time to prayer and contemplation. He spoke very warmly of the sincerity, the solid virtue, the humility, the deep spirit of devotion of Brahmans with whom he had intimate personal contact. I asked him whether in his opinion the sanity of these men was endangered by their contemplative existence; and he said that of course quantities of men do become unhinged by their austerity and superstition; but the sort of men he had in his mind were improved in their intellect and in their character by the contemplation they practise. It appears to me in presence of such surprisingly conflicting evidence, that it is difficult to come to any certain conclusion about Hindu religion. Yet

we may safely incline to the belief that there is in it a good side, and that some of these Brahman recluses do get nearer to truth and reality than is admitted by those who have seen only the other side.

We shall now turn to the Buddhist religion, which is in some ways more interesting to the modern mind than the Brahmanism out of which it sprang, but to which it offers many points of contrast. In estimating the importance of Buddhism we must not fall into the error of those who assume that it is in point of numbers the largest world-religion, that there are some 450 million Buddhists. Professors Legge and Monier Williams, than whom two better authorities could probably be named, agree that 100 million is the outside mark of their real totality, and that they are thus outnumbered not merely by Christians and Mahommedans, but also by Confucians and even Hindus. This is, however, not the important aspect of the value of Buddhism, but rather its moral and spiritual influence. Once more this question has been unfortunately complicated by the Theosophists of India and Europe, who not merely put the claims of Buddhism into competition with Christianity, giving, of course, the preference to the former, but also assert that Christianity is a debased derivative of the older faith. Of such Professor Poussin has well said, in concluding a short sketch of Buddhism:[1]

[1] *History of Religions*, Vol. I, p. 32.

"Neo-Buddhism is, if I may be permitted to express my opinion, at once frivolous and detestable, and perhaps dangerous for very feeble intellects."

It is well known that, as regards the doctrine of this strange off-shoot of Brahmanism, it is not like the parent stem in being even pantheistic. Whatever its morality, a matter which interests us at most indirectly, its contemplation would seem to be profoundly affected by its denial of the very existence of God. Religion without God appears an impossibility. Moreover, the contemplation is directed towards Nirvâna, and if this really spells annihilation, there is nothing more to be said. But Poussin, whom we shall follow again, as perhaps the best Catholic exponent of these Oriental faiths on the Continent, is in his larger works,[1] entirely opposed to this view, and professes on this question to follow the authority of Professor Oldenberg of Berlin. Although he (Poussin) praises David Rhŷs, the most influential writer on the subject in England, he considers that his works are hardly satisfactory in bringing out the complexity of the Buddhist metaphysic. He believes that Buddha maintained what he calls a pragmatic attitude regarding survival. "He knew that he would save creatures from new births (in which he believed with all his soul) to lead them to *Nirvâna* (in which he believed also, but without understanding it, for by its very definition it is ineffable), if

[1] *Bouddhisme, Etudes et Matériaux*, Paris, 1898, and *Bouddhisme, Opinions sur l'Histoire de son Dogme*, Paris, 1909.

only he could disgust them with desire,—that is, desire of pleasure, of existence, of non-existence. As doctor of the fever which is named Desire, he employs, in his treatment, allopathic remedies. "There is no personality; hence do not wish to become rich or a god. There are new births; so if you commit sin you will burn in hell or be reborn as ghost or earth-worm." *Nirvâna* is not existence: *Nirvâna* is not non-existence; it is far better than all that! Buddha, therefore, appears to have taught a sort of agnosticism, limited, however, to problems touching the essential nature of things; while his disciples pushed his nihilist doctrines to their logical extremes, which they then hailed as true; for such negations he did indeed recommend at times, as conducive to the suppression of desire and to hygiene." [1]

The Professor adds, however, that his view, however coherent, is by no means inevitable. He holds in fact that we are face to face with a notion which is and will ever remain to us alien and incomprehensible. In Brahman philosophy we can understand after all that the return to, nay *into,* the Supreme Being is absolute bliss, even though personality lose itself therein like a drop of water losing itself in the ocean. But the Buddhists deny this Supreme Being; their Nirvâna is neither a place nor a state; they heap argument on argument to prove that Nirvâna is a pure emptiness, the end

[1] *Loc. cit.*, p. 16–17.

of the activity of thought. From the standpoint of our logic, and according to any rigorous scheme of deduction such as ours, this would mean sheer nothingness. And yet, so to translate the word *Nirvâna* would be, according to the opinion of many competent Indianist scholars, a blunder which would vitiate our whole interpretation of Buddhism. Let us loyally recognize that the Hindu mind possesses a "category" a form of thought—which in ours is lacking.

The *Nirvâna,* then, or Immortality, or the Further Shore, or Home Unshaken, or Island, or Deliverance from Pain, is the *raison d'être* of the whole Buddhist way of life. It is to reach Nirvâna that a man becomes a monk. So far Professor Poussin.

Before considering further the logical implication of this doctrine, let us describe the actual contemplation which is described in the Buddhist work, *Lalita Vistara.*[1]

Contemplation (Dhyâna) which is the Crown of Life and the highest perfection for every man contains the following four degrees:—

1°. The enjoyment of a Calm which springs out of reasoning together with the freedom from all desire, from sin and the vices.

[1] A work in Sanskrit of uncertain date but undoubtedly very old, containing a legendary life of Buddha. See Art. by Weinhart (French translation) in *Dictionnaire de Théologie,* Vol. III, p. 266.

2°. A higher degree which now springs from the Suppression of all reasoning, and from Recollection of spirit in unity.

3°. An absolute Indifference to all things in the interior, nothing remaining but consciousness and memory with a feeling of joy which extends itself even to the bodily organism.

4°. The Renunciation of all joy as well as sorrow, this being the perfection of the memory and of the feeling of indifference. "The Spirit is now in a perfect silence in which it loses all movement and all feeling. This is Nirvâna; the spirit feels neither regret nor hope, neither pain nor pleasure. Yet there is not a complete loss of consciousness, but rather this now reaches its highest degree of perfection." This purification of the spirit and of the heart is not the sole result of Dhyâna;—by it the spirit penetrates at the same time into a higher world. For there are three worlds, that of desire, that of forms, and that without form.[1]

In the third of these worlds, the highest, there are four regions, each corresponding to one of the above degrees of contemplation. In the fourth region there is neither idea nor the absence of idea, the spirit is now indifferent to affirmation or negation. Anyone reaching this height is already become a Buddha.

It would take us too far afield to discuss Bud-

[1] Here again we cannot but be strongly reminded of Neoplatonic doctrine; but this similarity between Greek and Oriental thought need not be further discussed.

dhist philosophy, its doctrines of Karma, Renunciation, Transmigration, the Wheel of Life, Ataraxia, and Refreshment (Nirvâna). It is germane to our enquiry to weigh this doctrine neither on the side of logic where it is hopeless, nor on the side of morality, where it is a little better, nor yet on the side of dogmatic theology, where it is non-existent. Our query is in itself simple: though its answer may be far to seek. Can we discover in this system of contemplation any ground for believing that the Buddhist monk may have sometimes reached Reality better than he knew, better than his systematic teaching could warrant? True, he does not formally recognize the great God of Heaven, to whom all true contemplation must be directed. But is there not room for hoping that in spite of all his formal indifference to God and to religion, he really seeks the Unknown Deity, much as did the men of Athens when they raised to Him an altar upon the Areopagus? Could St. Paul have said to such devotees, had he met them: "What therefore, *you worship without knowing it,* that I preach to you?" [1]

Many Christians have held such a view even of Buddhist prayer, but we are not going to be so bold as to maintain its truth. It may, however, be well to remind our readers that Gotama's mind revolted against belief in God because he saw it in India identified with a corrupt and degrading idolatry, which he strove to tear out of the lives of

[1] Acts XVII. 23.

his people. So far we can respect him, and we may respect Mohammed all the more because, when he undertook to destroy paganism, he substituted for it a sort of doctrine of Monotheism,—or, more strictly, a form of egotism which he chose to proclaim monotheistic. If we allowed ourselves to judge by an ethical standard,[1] are we sure that in all respects we should give the palm to Mohammed? Leaving aside the gross exaggerations of the Neo-Buddhists, to which we have already referred, we may, I think, grant that this strange religion comes nearer to Christianity than any other (with the single exception of Judaism). Where else shall we find a religion inculcating love for all men as a distinct subject of meditation, one's own enemies not being excluded? Yet this is the teaching of Gotama. Here we will again take a Catholic guide, Prof. Aiken of the Catholic University of America. He writes:[2]

"The moral code of Buddhism extends to thoughts and desires no less than to words and actions. Unchastity in all its forms, drunkenness, lying, stealing, envy, pride, harshness are fittingly condemned. But what perhaps brings Buddhism most strikingly in contact with Christianity, is its

[1] We are, of course, referring to Buddhist religion at its best, as it exists in Burmah and Ceylon, and not as it is in Thibet, wretchedly corrupted, or in China and Japan, manifestly commingled with alien beliefs. To deny that Buddhism is a religion is to strip words of all their meaning.

[2] See Art. *Buddhism* in the Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 30.

spirit of gentleness and forgiveness of injuries. To cultivate benevolence towards men of all classes, to avoid anger and physical violence, to be patient under insult, to return good for evil,—all this was inculcated in Buddhism and helped to make it one of the gentlest religions."

What a contrast to the fierce pride of the Mussulman and the narrow nationalism of the Shinto or the Confucian! The Buddhist monk begins his contemplation by thinking of all men and all living beings—he must first call to mind those who are near him and especially of those with whom he has disagreed,—and later his thought must extend itself till it reaches the very confines of the earth. Those who remember Kipling's picture of the wandering Buddhist monk, in *Kim,* will realize the sort of character which is produced by this kind of meditation.

We must, however, guard against sentiment, which does not carry you far in theology; *ex hypothesi,* these contemplatives have no formulated knowledge of a personal God. The Buddhist's thought, like his Brahman brother's, is wholly of pure Rest from trouble. Does he come nearer the Peace which passeth understanding? He is thinking of something Beyond, something that will never fail, the only true Reality. Does this thought bring him any nearer to the heart of God? Mysticism is not the same thing as logic (though it is the main purpose of this essay to prove that its processes are fundamentally intellectual). We

did not see any reason to turn down Plotinus who held that God is beyond being and is in some sense non-Being.[1]

If we would judge mercifully of the Buddhist's contemplation, we must decide its merits, not according to his principles, but according to ours. We hold that God is very near those who seek him. We also hold that it is a natural thing for a man to love God if only he can remove the obstacles, and that no matter how sunk men may be in ignorance and sin, their human faculties are not entirely corrupted in the sense that no good remains in them. Let us now apply these principles to the case in hand; let us suppose that the Buddhist ascetic who devotes himself to a life of self-denial, charity to other men, and contemplative thought, is really overcoming the obstacles to the natural love of God. What is he doing? He is certainly giving himself up to the good;—why should the Supreme Good be excluded from his mental purview because he is taught that the Supreme Good is impersonal,—is non-being, as he understands,—is what his teachers name Nirvâna? We put this question, but we prefer not to answer it definitely, —for truly the human soul is a mystery like to the God who made it.

In dealing with the problem of natural contemplation we seem to have raised more questions than

[1] Even Catholic philosophers most commonly hold that *being* cannot be predicated of God and of creatures in the same sense (the analogy of *Ens*).

we can answer. This may appear regrettable, but we felt that without at least stating these problems, to proceed to the discussion of supernatural mysticism would be worse than useless. To believe that human nature, when deprived of divine grace, is entirely bad, superstitious, and given over to the worst corruption, is to take a one-sided view of human life. Tares and wheat, we are told, grow side by side. In spite of the evil in the world, man's higher nature does (even aside from purely super-natural remedies) at times assert itself and struggle towards the light. Endowed with intelligence and freedom, the soul can burn like a flame, and also mount. And as for sin,—original and actual,—it spreads like a canker, but also its very grossness may cause a reaction and may sting to life the mystical faculty in man, as we know happened at the beginning of the Christian triumph.

The question before us is this: When the spirit of man in its native weakness, without the saving grace of regeneration, uses its natural freedom and intelligence to draw towards the author of its being, what kind of help does God extend to it, not as belonging to any covenant with a fallen race, but still as viewing his creatures with friendly sympathy and fatherly compassion? When the human soul in a state of natural isolation reaches out towards some spiritual power of which it knows little—when in silence and solitude it seems to call upon the Author of all the beauty and gran-

deur in nature, tries to commune with him at least as present in his works—what is the response which is vouchsafed to such a contemplative by God?

We have said that revelation tells us little directly on this subject and we must, therefore, not pretend that we know more than we do. Yet we have certain anchors of our faith. One of these is that God's providence is over all his works, and this seems to imply what we may call a spiritual (but not strictly supernatural) providence over man, pagan man, fallen man, who after all is a spiritual being. There seems therefore to us to be no difficulty in believing that the merciful God may extend to natural contemplatives, within the province of their own psychology, a strengthening and steadying influence, which will enable them to put their cognitive and appetitive faculties to the best account and to persevere in their good tendencies in spite of all temptations to desist. And this without elevating them beyond the confines of their own nature and conferring upon them the sovereign grace of regeneration which is connatural neither to humanity nor to any created being.[1]

Thus we may conclude that natural contempla-

[1] How far God may or does grant supernatural aids (in the full sense) to persons outside the Church, is a matter which concerns theologians, but does not come under our province to discuss. We have no idea of *limiting* God's operation to aids in the natural order even among Pagans; but merely assert that in the absence of higher aids, we must be careful not to deny the possibility of the lower.

tion is not merely possible, but that it may sometimes be carried to a point which has a sublimity of its own, even when without any real relation to Christian mysticism or Christian Faith.

CHAPTER IV.

Perverted Mysticism.

The history of mankind has been to a great extent the history of superstition, much of which may be termed, at least in the broader sense, mystical. This proposition will, we expect, be so plain to the reader, that he will hardly require the same sort of evidence for it which we thought it necessary to collect regarding natural contemplation. In the case of perverted Mysticism, we are unfortunately too far from requiring proof of its existence, it stares us everywhere in the face. The medieval philosophers held it as an axiom that "the corruption of the best is the worst," and that is never more true than in all that relates to religion.

It is not for its own sake that we take up a subject so melancholy as the perversion of Divine Contemplation, but in order to clear our minds and to remove difficulties in the way of our proper enquiry. In the first place, there has been an immense amount of false Mysticism within as well as outside of the Catholic Church, and it has not been always confined to persons suspected of heretical tendencies. More than that, in the case of those who might be, so far as is known, described

as genuine mystics, there is always a possibility of illusion at some particular point of their experiences. Hence the least that readers have a right to expect in an essay about true mysticism, is that we should lay down some general principles by which it is possible to reprobate any given class or individual as superstitious and deluded in their claim to rank as mystics.

It follows, therefore, as important that before entering upon the problems presented by genuine Mysticism, we should institute some examination of the false, though without attempting to describe at great length the aberrations of supposed contemplatives. We believe that if we are merely able to establish criteria by which the genuine article could be distinguished from its spurious competitors, we shall thereby put our enquiry upon a sound foundation. But we may warn our readers that the distinction is often a fine one, and when we descend to detail, by no means easy of application. Anyone with even a slight knowledge of Catholicity must be aware how large a part Mysticism has ever played in the system of the Church. She is redolent of prayer, and much of her prayer is mystical in the strictest sense of the term. The greatest Catholics have been mystics. Joan of Arc, St. Bernard, Aquinas, St. Ignatius, St. Teresa, Dante, Thomas à Kempis, St. Augustine, Lacordaire, St. Louis, St. Patrick, St. Vincent of Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, Suarez, Bossuet, Bellarmine, St. Francis Xavier,—all were mystics. Nor is

there anything in the Catholic religion which has been attacked more fiercely than the practice of contemplation and the monastic system which is so closely connected therewith. The modern spirit, which dislikes every restriction and any doctrine of spirituality it cannot understand, attacks all Mysticism indiscriminately, no matter whether good or bad. We do not approach the subject from the controversial standpoint, but it will be readily granted that any light that can be thrown upon the true nature of contemplation, as distinct from absurd and inflated imitation, will be serviceable to the cause of Catholicity.

The ultimate test of the value of prayer can never be found in a theoretical standard, for psychological growth can be known only by its results, as the sap in a tree can be estimated by its fruits. This principle of reason and of common sense has been at all times abundantly recognised in the Catholic Church. Our enquiry cannot, therefore, be more than tentative because it will proceed along the lines of mental analysis. And its difficulty will be great.

The essence of Mysticism must be found in some kind of direct communion of the human spirit with God, and investigation about it must, in the first instance, be supplied by mystical persons, especially by such as we believe on other grounds to be most trustworthy in recounting their own experience. The difficulty of understanding and interpreting what Catholic mystics tell us is, even

in the case of the most enlightened and cautious writers, extremely great. They say themselves that words fail them in trying to express what they have seen and felt. God reveals himself to them in darkness, and it is one of the generally accepted tests of the genuine Mysticism not to be able fully to explain itself. St. Teresa,—and it is the same with other great authorities,—is continually repeating that, in spite of her efforts in obedience to her director, it is impossible for her to describe her mental experiences. These people are, as it were, tongue-tied. This is not strange if we remember that human language, when it describes divine things, must borrow images taken from created essences, and what the mystics want to tell us, but in which they fail, is what God is in His Essence, for that is really what mystic prayer is concerned with.

This darkness may be perhaps explained (as even Plato discerned when he described the man who came out of the dark cave into the full blaze of the summer's sun) as due to the excess of light which the mystic has encountered and in which it is impossible to see anything clearly. But, whatever the cause, the fact remains that the statements of mystical souls about their prayer are not often easy of comprehension. Again, even where there is a clear statement as to any interior occurrence, if there is a question of referring it to its true source, that is of trying to decide whether a given psychic event is attributable to a natural or to a

supernatural cause, we have no certain guarantee as to the truth, even in the case of canonized Saints. By her preliminary processes regarding them the Church declares that nothing contrary to faith and morals has been detected in the statements submitted for examination, but she by no means pretends to confer infallibility upon the Saints in regard to their psychological experiences. When, however, mystical souls are keenly alive to the danger of self-deception and inclined to be guarded in their utterances, should they speak emphatically on a point involving a large spiritual experience, we may consider it reasonable to give them the benefit of a doubt.

In the present chapter, therefore, we do not intend to give any historical enumeration of various types of mystical follies, even though we may have to allude to some of them by way of illustration. It is merely our object to attempt to trace the psychological roots which have led in the past to error and failure. It will not be necessary to distinguish in this matter between natural and supernatural contemplation. We have already stated that perversion has occurred inside as well as outside the Christian Church, and generally speaking the causes will have been fundamentally identical as regards Catholics or heretics, theists or pagans.

We might say a word here about negative as distinct from positive perversion. By this I mean the withdrawal of all real effort to seek God by con-

templation among those who have dedicated themselves to the work. Thus individuals or whole communities of professed contemplatives may become relaxed and careless about their prayer. This is a serious abuse and causes much disedification, whether among Catholics of other religionists. Also the occurrence of relaxation in contemplative Orders has given a handle to those who hate and despise Monasticism in all its forms, and is even made a ground for attacking the Catholic Church for encouraging it.[1] We are not concerned now to discuss the evils which may have existed among monks and nuns (which everyone knows to have been grossly exaggerated) owing to their falling away from the higher ideals of prayer and contemplation. Our task is to consider the evils which are inherent in the prayer itself when it has taken a wrong turn; and not only when it is pretermitted.

What I propose to do is to trace three distinct stages in a process of perversion, not intending that they are all of them fully discernible in every

[1] A curious instance of this disposition occurred in Dublin in the year 1909. An appeal was made to the Privy Council to prevent the newly-founded Queen's University of Belfast (mainly a Presbyterian institution) from founding a chair in Scholastic Philosophy. The argument was that a professor holding such a chair would necessarily impart Catholic doctrine, and when asked by the Court to give an instance, the witness specified the doctrine of "Monasticism," and no other. The appeal was, of course, dismissed (See *The Value of Scholastic Philosophy*, C. T. S. of Ireland).

case, but distinguishing them as psychological laws which, if operative, will have a progressive effect in human souls.

1. The first kind of perversion, according to such a classification, would consist in a form of egotism which alienates the contemplative from his true object, which is spiritual Truth, Beauty and Goodness, as in some sense external, though not unrelated, to himself. The object of contemplation is recognised as something that brings personal happiness, else the quest for it would not be undertaken. But the process will naturally involve pain. It includes the avoidance of distraction caused by sensible affections, and this removal must be necessarily painful. In all mystical systems there is included an ascetic discipline, about which it is difficult to say whether its severity is more extreme among pagans or among Christians. Secondly, the process includes a concentration of the soul upon its work, which is often as painful as the prerequisite mortification of the senses and faculties.

But there is another side to the process. It may bring spiritual joy, elation, the feeling of freedom, triumph, and transformation. As soon as the soul, turning inwards, recognises these transports, whether quiet or violent it matters not; as soon as it accepts them, not merely as an accompaniment of prayer but as its true aim and object, the contemplation is at once imperilled. The imagination steps in and occupies the place of the intellect

and will. In order to understand how acute this mode of perversion may become, and how deeply rooted is its cause in the fibre of our nature, we have only to consider what a powerful tyranny the imagination commonly exercises over the heart. We refer now not to prayer only, but to our ordinary psychological processes. We may consider this as revealed in literature, especially in regard to childhood, depicted in autobiography or fiction. It is widely recognised that children who are otherwise quite normal frequently live in a world of their own, where they find the most intense happiness in elaborating a purely imaginary structure of life, sometimes founded partly on what they have read, and sometimes evoked out of their own inner consciousness. As an instance of what I mean I may quote a passage from an average story, which is apparently, however, in some sense autobiographical:[1]

"Jeremy was a perfectly normal little boy, and I defy anyone to have discovered in him at this stage of his progress strange morbidities and irregular instincts. Nevertheless eight years old is not too early for stranger impulses and wilder dreams than most parents ever conceive of, and the fortnight that followed Jeremy's meeting with the Sea Captain was as peculiar and fantastic a fortnight as he was ever in all his later life to know. For he was haunted—really haunted in the good old solid practical meaning of the term—

[1] *Jeremy*, by Hugh Walpole, Chap. V.

and not only by the Sea Captain but by a thousand things that attended in that hero's company. He was haunted by a picture—whence it had come to him he did not know—of a dead-white road, dropping over the hill with shadow, the light fading around it, black heavy hedges on every side of it. From below the hill came the pounding of the sea . . . and upon the road his eyes were always fixed as though he was expecting someone."

For an account of a child among books and a similarly active imagination, stimulated this time in a religious direction by a chance acquaintance with *Pilgrim's Progress,* see the Life of *John William Walshe* by Montgomery Carmichael (Chap. I, pp. 13–19). It is hardly necessary to multiply examples of this tendency in children, which is mentioned here only to show that the "imaginative" instinct is a primitive one, most deeply rooted in human nature. It is undoubtedly quickened by ascetic practices, and for all mystics, Catholic or not, with a sensitive temperament, the abuse of this faculty becomes a constant and inveterate snare. It draws them to seek pleasure in certain psychological states, while they are supposed to be seeking the knowledge and the will of God. One of the most difficult things to understand in this context is the love that false mystics, even at the stages we are considering, appear to take in the mortification of the flesh. This is indeed a sad chapter in the history of religion, and volumes have been written about the macerations and flag-

ellations of pagans and heretics. But we must return to this later. So far we have not postulated any source of evil except a perverted aiming at spiritual emotion for its own sake. In this stage of aberration, as we consider it, there is nothing morally wrong, nothing of necessity morbid or even fantastic,—merely a very subtle kind of self-deception, which may be fraught with serious danger. Before the spiritual character of the contemplative is solidified, as in the case of a child of tender years, a slight warp may be a sure omen of what later development will manifest.

2. The second stage in perversion bears a more sinister appearance; we mean the uprising of deep-seated spiritual pride. The soul, finding a facility in meditation, finding that its longings for spiritual elevation gain more and more satisfaction, mistakes its own self-elicited devotion for the inspiration of the Divine Being, and plunges deeply into automatism, becoming more and more ecstatic. In the Catholic Church, where an authentic direction is provided for contemplative souls, a remedy against the beginnings of pride is at hand. It is a common sentiment among us that contemplation involves many spiritual dangers, and it is also of common belief that true Mysticism will always be accompanied by a deep mental and spiritual humility, and especially by self-distrust. But the history of mysticism among Catholics also gives us too many instances of the wreck and ruin caused by egotism. Hence, when we find a more or less

rampant pride among the votaries of other systems which lack the external safe-guards of the Catholic religion, it is by no means surprising to see it accompanied by spiritual blindness and every kind of psychic and moral perversion. It is certainly our belief that, where natural contemplatives are not merely in good faith, but serious in their search for absolute truth and goodness, they will be saved, whether from their own natural good sense or from a certain divine protection and assistance (in the natural order), from false emotionalism and the spiritual pride which so frequently accompanies it. The evil effects of perversion are only too flagrant, the good may be hidden away; and thus we may hope that even among such as do not come under supernatural revelation, many natural contemplatives may exist who are known to God alone. But alas! it would be impossible to maintain that such instances are according to the common rule.

3. The third and most obvious stage of perversion will be found where spiritual self-indulgence and spiritual pride are combined with a desire for notoriety or material profit. Here will be an explanation of the absurdities, chicaneries, and systematic frauds with which the history of superstitious Mysticism in all countries and ages has abounded. If, however, we thought it necessary to give rules by which sub-conscious fraud or even pure illusion is to be distinguished from the grosser forms of cheating the simple-minded, we

should be in a difficult case. Such clearly-marked distinction is fortunately not required for our purpose, which is merely to distinguish between true and false Mysticism. If we may give an opinion, we think that, allowing for huge systematic frauds of the most unblushing kind, there is among the votaries of superstition more self-deception than they sometimes get credit for. If we extend the principle that even a persistent liar ends by deceiving himself, when he can deceive no one else, we may believe that many another is but half a liar when he is wholly a fool.

We have referred to a distorted view of interior prayer, but the subject is complicated by questions relating to exterior manifestations of spiritual force. The Catholic view of contemplation is that it is not merely an effort of the soul to reach God by piercing the veil which enwraps him, but also the effort of God to commune personally with the Christian soul. And God chooses sometimes to manifest his presence by unusual methods. On the other hand, when contemplative prayer is carried far, the effect upon the human brain and the whole organism may be such as to produce abnormal conditions, and this is equally true of the best as of the worst forms of Mysticism. The huge development in our days of psychic science and even of human physiology is tending to modify the attitude of students of Mysticism towards many phenomena which were formerly considered by Catholics and others as due to supernatural

causes. The psychology of Mysticism is thus rightly engaging the attention of recent writers on the subject, and it is not improbable that ultimately sacred science will gain by the light which may be thrown upon it by the human element in mystical experience. It does not lie within our scope to attempt any criticism of neuropathic theories; we merely wish to hint that pitfalls are prepared for any over-dogmatic statements about perverted Mysticism.

We may anyhow take it as being now an admitted principle that ecstasy and rapture, a not uncommon accompaniment of prolonged contemplation, need not be attributed to divine or diabolic action upon the human spirit, but may be, and commonly is, a connatural effect of severe strain upon the faculties. The mystic reaches out with all his psychic force in one direction, if his prayer be genuine towards God, if perverted towards something different indeed, but possessing a strong emotional attraction. This kind of concentration has been often likened to that of the mathematician in his science or of the artist or musician in his theme. Sometimes, it is true, a kind of abstraction may be noticed in such persons, which is like the beginning of ecstasy; but it should also be remembered that absorption in divine things is radically different from any ordinary process of the imagination or reasoning faculty. It often happens, moreover, but not necessarily, that mystics are strongly temperamental.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the term "ecstasy" is used with different shades of meaning. Besides the use which is clearly metaphorical, mystical writers use the word sometimes in a more spiritual, sometimes in the strictly physiological sense of a complete suspension of the external faculties.[1] We are here dealing with the latter. But this is only one and perhaps the simplest of the psycho-physical accompaniments of Mysticism. There is Stigmatization, an experience which seems to have first happened to the Saint of Assisi, but subsequently to hundreds of persons, many of whom gave no reason to suspect them of exceptional sanctity. Such bleedings of mystics have not been always confined to the hands and feet and side, but have occurred in other parts of the body, such as the head and shoulder. There is Levitation, the well-known phenomena of the body being raised from the ground during prayer and remaining so without any visible support, a result which, it is claimed, modern Spiritists have several times successfully imitated. It is known that in a few cases of great Saints, Bilocation has occurred, or the presence of a human person in more than one place simultaneously, under circumstances where the theory of a mere apparition is apparently excluded.

This last manifestation implies a state of existence which is connatural to God alone, and where

[1] Not a suspension of the spiritual faculties, which are of course quickened, at least in the supernatural ecstasy. In this it differs from mere unconsciousness.

it can be proved to occur must constitute a direct and most marvellous exercise of divine omnipotence. That miracles of the first order occur is a matter of Faith; and where they can be properly demonstrated under circumstances which make it clear that no other motive can be postulated except to give testimony to the sanctity of a person, they could be quoted as evidence of genuine Mysticism. But nothing is more noteworthy than the reluctance of ecclesiastical authority to admit such evidence apart from considerations of a different order. In any case, the required circumstances occur relatively very seldom, and it is our object to maintain that in the ordinary run of events, psychic manifestations are not and cannot be a direct test of the genuine contemplative, although we wish to prove that indirectly they may help to provide us with a standard. Extraordinary gifts have been very prevalent among the greatest mystics of the Catholic Church, and we may safely assume that God chooses to testify by such means his love for the Saints. Yet it is certain that miraculous signs are usually associated with still more divine prerogatives; and it is the love of the marvellous that in the popular mind elevates into a certain test of holiness, that which need not be in itself even miraculous.

But what is worse for our particular enquiry, superficial minds not merely look for extraordinary gifts as an accompaniment of genuine Mysticism, but they practically identify them with con-

templative union. Granted that many strange experiences, material and mental, frequently accompany the highest kind of prayer, these things are also found among those whom we know for quite other reasons to be misguided and self-deceived, though ecstatical persons.

How are we to conclude because certain contemplatives are subject to extraordinary physical states, or that they report themselves to have received revelations, touches of the soul, divine locutions in their ears or intelligence, that their Mysticism is of the right sort? Let us neglect the popular imagination and turn to recognised authorities.

It may be if we turn to mystical literature of a few centuries back, we shall find more attention devoted to psychic manifestations than is common among Catholic authorities to-day. But it is wrong and scarcely honest of anti-Catholic writers to pretend, as they do,[1] that in the Church countenance was ever given to the identification of mystical prayer with supposed mystical states. It is like accusing Churchmen of being ignorant of science, because those of the 17th century were not acquainted with modern physics and astronomy;

[1] We are sorry to say that the Dean of St. Paul's, who has written well on some aspects of Mysticism, is quite obsessed with this wrong-headed idea about Catholic mystical writers. In his Bampton Lectures of 1899 (*Christian Mysticism*), he distinctly states, on pp. 264–5, that it is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that "mystical phenomena are identified with mysticism."

or Saint Paul of being cruel because he treated of slavery as being *de facto* an actual institution. Very likely the earlier mystics did not distinguish as clearly as we can the miraculous from the psychological;—but did they therefore mix up the values of things which are disparate? We defy Dean Inge to produce a passage from any of the writings on Mysticism which have carried weight with Catholics, stating that these extraordinary gifts or manifestations are of real importance in comparison with a gift of prayer. To bring evidence to the contrary would require a volume, besides being an insult to the intelligence of my Catholic readers. Still less could such psychic states be considered the test of genuine contemplation.

There is, however, a strong contrast upon the whole between true and perverted Mysticism in regard to extraordinary manifestations, though we believe that they are found as commonly as not combined with every sort of error, fraud, and depravity. This contrast lies precisely in the attitude held towards these phenomena, and herein is the indirect test to which we have alluded. Let us look briefly at the history of false and superstitious Mysticism, wherever it be found (we have already stated that there has been plenty of it among Catholics); we shall find it has been distinguished not merely by marvellous features, but by laying great stress upon these as a test of veracity. The

founders of religions and of sects have usually been addicted to contemplation and have used their mystic experience as a lever to spread their ideas. In stating this I would not be understood to imply that they have been consciously deceiving others, but merely that they have interpreted their psychic states as corroborations of a divine message. I cannot cite a better witness to this general law than Professor William James, who wrote: [1] "You will in point of fact hardly find a religious leader of any kind in whose life there is no record of automatisms. I speak not merely of savage priests and prophets, whose followers regard automatic utterances and action as by itself tantamount to inspiration, I speak of leaders of thought and subjects of intellectualized experience." It is true that in his enumeration of such leaders the Professor includes the Hebrew Prophets, Saint Paul, Saints of the Catholic Church, and even Christ himself as being authors of "automatic" utterances,—in addition to Mohammed, Buddha, "the Luthers, the Foxes, the Wesleys," Joseph Smith,—and, we might add, Swedenborg, Edward Irving, John Huss, and a whole host of heresiarchs, to say nothing of contemporary religionists such as Mrs. Eddy, Dr. Dowie, and other propagandists of Theosophy and Spiritism. That non-Catholic mystics, not all equally depraved, have relied and do rely upon revelations, visions, and other psychic experiences

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 478–9.

to propagate religious doctrine is a notorious fact, about which it is unnecessary to adduce elaborate evidence.

And now we have to deal with Professor James' allegation that Catholic mystics are open to a similar charge. We shall not complicate the matter by arguments relating to Prophets or Apostles who were divinely chosen as channels of an authentic revelation. Our enquiry relates to Catholic Saints and Mystics subsequent to the institution of the Church.

In the first place, so far from laying stress upon extraordinary manifestations of sanctity, our authorities cannot even supply any direct and certain test by which their origin can be traced. The Mystics may themselves have a conviction that they came from God, and sometimes so strongly that they are physically unable to entertain doubt on the subject. But this, as we have said, is comparatively rare; and a prudent director does, as far as possible, discourage his client from accepting as divine any strange experience.

But even supposing in any given circumstances the mystical experience were referred to a supernatural cause, this would be very far from accepting it as a proof of any doctrine which was otherwise held doubtful. On the contrary, if any judgment about the nature of a communication were considered desirable, the very first test to be applied would be the doctrinal orthodoxy and then the humility of the person in question. It has

often happened that a point relating to doctrine was involved, at least indirectly, in a supposed communication from Heaven; in such cases the Church is doubly careful about giving any approval or countenance to such a statement.

Notice, we do not deny that in the Catholic Church visions and revelations of mystical persons have influenced the authorities in regard to important matters, as when Pope Gregory VI returned to Rome when St. Catherine demanded it in the name of God; just as when the visions and "voices" of St. Joan of Arc were operative in causing the relief of Orleans and the Crowning of Charles at Rheims. And again, founders of Religious Orders like St. Francis and St. Ignatius Loyola, or Reformers like St. Teresa, were often mystics and declared that they were personally commissioned by God to carry on their work. But these things are in the practical order. We may challenge historians to find instances of doctrinal propaganda based upon visions and revelations of Saints or others. Where doctrine has been at stake, as in the well-known instance of the revelations about the Sacred Heart, so far from these being taken as a proof of the soundness of the doctrine involved, it required over a century of heated controversy among theologians as to the orthodoxy of the doctrine before the revelations could be fully admitted. Thus it is true to say that the Catholic Church, which claims a divine promise of miracles, lays less store upon miraculous events as to their

evidential value, than do false religions upon manifestations which are often clearly imaginary, if not fraudulent. Our essay is not, however, intended to be apologetic, and we have insisted upon this aspect of Catholic Mysticism purely as a matter of contrast. Without stating that the fact is universal, we have noted a strong tendency among pagans and heretics to boast of their visions and to take evident delight in their pathological states. The reverse will be found in the case of genuine Catholic mystics; they shrink not merely from the notoriety attending what is strange, but from knowing that they are the recipients of extraordinary gifts which, though they may be connected with sanctity, are not so of necessity. So far from glorying in these phenomena, they are afraid of them, being distinctly warned that such signs need not even indicate the state of grace and are always a danger to that humility which is most precious in their eyes.

As a classical instance of the above principle we may consider St. Teresa's *Autobiography,* a work which has been considered in literary importance second only to St. Augustine's *Confessions.* The writing was undertaken by the express command of her confessor, the Dominican Fr. Ibáñez, with a view to submitting her spiritual experiences to the judgment of St. John of Avila. It was in any case a perilous thing for a woman to write on theological subjects in the Spain of the later 16th century, and St. Teresa had not been highly educated in the

ordinary sense. She wrote to Ibáñez: "I am much tempted to give you some idea of what I have gone through for your sake in writing the history of my life. I feel I have a right to do so after all I have suffered in seeing my own description of myself and in recalling to my memory the miseries of my life."

We might mention, with regard to another classical treatise attributed to a female saint, the *Dialogue on Purgatory* of St. Catherine of Genoa, that it is proved to have been compiled by others after the saint's death.[1]

One point still remains to be touched upon. It might be asked: Granted that the Church does not regard extraordinary occurrences as more than the accompaniments of mystical prayer, yet are they not of a high importance? For instance, with regard to ecstasy, is not this a phenomenon to be almost invariably expected at a certain stage of contemplation in the case of genuinely mystical souls? Up to a certain point ecstasy is often spoken of by St. Teresa and other writers as a regular phase of Mysticism. But others speak differently, and this may be owing to the fact that mystical terminology is not always used quite in the same sense. We must, of course, make a distinction between ecstasy or rapture, and other extraordinary powers, such as visions, revelations, divine touches and locutions of various sorts.

[1] See Fr. Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Vol. I, pp. 90–3, and Appendix, p. 371.

Such events as these are due, in so far as they are real and not imaginary, solely to the divine Spirit, whereas ecstasy in its psychological aspect need not be supernatural, but rather a consequence of weakness, and so it is often treated by the earlier as well as the later authorities.[1]

In any case, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross both make it clear that in the highest stages of spirituality ecstasy and rapture are not to be expected. Speaking of Spiritual Marriage, St. Teresa observes:[2] "When the soul has reached this state, it has scarcely any more of the impetuous raptures of which I spoke, even ecstasies and soarings of the spirit become very rare."

And St. John of the Cross:[3] "In the perfect these raptures and physical sufferings have no place, for they enjoy liberty of spirit with unclouded and unsuspended senses." St. Francis of Sales treats of the higher graces as consisting entirely of love, without assuming that any miraculous accompaniments are to be looked for. Hence, in what we shall suggest in the following chapters as to the theory of divine contemplation, we shall

[1] Suarez, who quotes St. Thomas and Cajetan to the same effect, says that probably ecstasy follows upon contemplation naturally (or connaturally) as regards the suspension of the external faculties. (*De Oratione*, Lib. II, Cap. XV, n. 5.) See also Père Poulain, *Graces of Supernatural Prayer*, Ch. XVIII, p. 243; and Fr. Lambelle (*loc. cit.*, pp. 185–7). He quotes St. John of the Cross as speaking of ecstasies as "these infirmities."

[2] *The Interior Castle*, 7th Mansion, Ch. III.

[3] *The Obscure Night* (tr. L. Thompson), Bk. II, Chap. I.

prescind from what is extraordinary, believing that it will thus be easier to grasp what is essential in Mysticism if we refrain from considering the accidental.

Briefly now to summarize, we have maintained in this chapter the following propositions: 1° It is most difficult to decide between the true and the false Mysticism (unless we allow ourselves to judge by their results); 2° Psychic or strange phenomena internal or external cannot furnish a satisfactory test; 3° A strong contrast can, however, be commonly discerned between classes of mystics in their mental attitude towards such phenomena, and particularly in a tendency to use them for the propagation of religious ideas.

CHAPTER V.

The Catholic Mysticism.

We are now coming to the heart of our subject, the previous chapters being merely of a preliminary nature. For we did not discuss natural contemplation, and much less the perversions of history, for their own sake, but merely to clear the ground of our intelligence for an enquiry as to the inner nature of true Mysticism. Even in the present chapter we shall find a convenient starting place in the comparison of natural and supernatural contemplation; later we shall contrast mystical with discursive prayer.

Both pagan and Christian mystics concentrate their thought upon the Divine Nature and its attributes. This appears to be of the essence of all Mysticism. What is peculiar in the prayer of the Christian is that it is inspired by faith. The pagan, as such, knows God through nature, and in no other way, and even at first glance it must be apparent what a fundamental change is introduced into contemplation when the fact of a divine revelation is postulated. We have maintained that it was possible, at least for a natural man like Plato, endowed with reason, imagination, passion,

genius, to form to himself a sublime idea of absolute goodness and beauty; yet in such a case, and much more in the case of less gifted men, it does not require argument to convince that to build up a system of contemplation (even allowing for a certain guidance and strengthening of the faculties in their own order), human reason must be a weak instrument compared with the fervor of divine faith.

The God on whom Christian mystics lavish their devotion is not mainly conceived by them as the God of nature—of the sun and the stars, of the rain and the thunder, of the earth with its verdure, the sea with its brood, and the air alive with the songs of birds;—or again of man with his restless labors, his changeful moods, and his heart prone to hate as to love. The God of the Christians is a well-known, tender, familiar God. He came down to seek us, he lived and died to win us, He feeds us with his own flesh, He calls us his adopted brethren, He has sent to us His Spirit of love to guide and guard us, He is waiting to receive us in his Heaven above, He is the Word made Flesh, the Son of Mary,—Jesus Christ. A small amount of reflexion will convince us that a heartfelt belief in all the mysteries of the Christian Faith (such as we suppose the Catholic mystic to possess) must very profoundly affect his contemplation of the Divinity. Not but there is some difficulty, because it is not the part of the mystic, as such, to dwell at least deliberately upon the several mys-

teries of the Faith, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the sacramental system, or the temporal mission of the Holy Ghost. He tends as directly as he knows how to the thought of God as He is in Himself, and therefore it might be asked even now, how can supernatural contemplation differ from the natural, if indeed the proper object of each is the same?

We would answer that the object is not the same in any formal sense. Prayer tends to its object, not as it is in itself, but rather as it is apprehended by the person praying. We may illustrate this by the case of the Blessed, who view God's essence directly as it is in itself, and not with the aid of any medium, such as is supplied by reason on the one hand and by faith on the other. God is differently apprehended by the Blessed, and therefore the contemplation they enjoy is radically different from all other sorts, whatever they be in themselves. Attention to what we know is different from attention to that we know not: where there are different sorts of knowledge, there will be different sorts of attention.

Let us look at this subject in the concrete. If we turn to the utterances of our mystics and to their visions, we shall learn how entirely their prayer is dominated by faith in Christ. St. Paul, a typical mystic if there is one, trained in the spirituality of a mystical race, when he tells of his raptures and such-like, is ever centred on the person and mission of the Messias. St. Francis of

Assisi, who received the stigmata as a reward for his devotion to the Passion of Christ, is as characteristic of the Mysticism of the Middle Age as St. Ignatius and St. Teresa are of that of a later date. Where are we to look for more striking examples of passionate enthusiasm for the Word made Flesh? Is it necessary to multiply examples to prove the obvious, namely, that all the great Christian mystics have taken as their theme the Person of Christ, His love of us,—divine, of course, but human as well?

If we may name one towering instance of this law, we should like to refer to him who was the greatest personality of a great age,—virile, active, a born ruler of men, fearless in rebuking kings, statesmen, and Popes, unsparing of his invective when castigating Abelard,—yet in his mystical writings how simple how tender and true. What poetry is in Bernard's hymn to the Sacred Name, one of the great treasures of our later liturgy, the "Jesu Dulcis Memoria." Let me quote two fragments: "Quam pius es petentibus! Sed quid invenientibus?" and, "Nec lingua valet dicere, Nec littera exprimere; Expertus potest credere, Quid sit Iesum diligere." Is there anything sweeter?—The very roughness of the rhythm emphasises its sonorous strength, and captivates the sense as well as the spirit. This hymn is not a *jeu d'esprit,* it expresses the soul of St. Bernard's whole life, his work, his writings, his mystical flair. Great contemplative that he was, master of mystical theol-

ogy and promoter of European Monasticism—the simple love of Jesus and Mary was as strongly marked in his case as in that of the soldier-saint of the Basque Province.

On the other hand, we must guard against the supposition that Christian mystics have been less prone than pagans to contemplate the God of Nature and to find in creation motives for loving and admiring the beauty and wisdom which we find manifest in the world of sense. The case of Augustine and his mother at Ostia will occur to everyone. In the dialogue which we suppose to be familiar to the reader, the disciple of Plato breathes the very soul of pure poetry and mystic love. He records for us [1] how his and his mother's thoughts were raised "through corporeal things and through the heaven itself, from which the sun, moon and stars illumine the earth; then entering into their own minds and passing them in turn as they mounted higher and higher to that country of never-failing plenty, where Israel is fed forever with the bread of truth, and when life consists in the Wisdom by which all things have been made—itself not having been made, for it is eternal . . . And while we spoke and panted after this wisdom, we touched it for a moment by just one little heart-beat; and we sighed and left fastened to it the first fruits of the Spirit,—and so returned back to the words of our mouth." And thus they discoursed again upon God and upon Heaven.

[1] *Confessions*, Bk. IX, Chap. 10.

Now this passage has been always prized by Catholics as a most sublime description of the purest contemplation, yet there is found in it no word relating to the distinctive articles of the Catholic faith, except indeed of those truths which can be drawn from natural reason, the existence of God the Creator, who is Truth and Wisdom.

The stories told of St. Ignatius during the years when he was verging to the end illustrate this side of Catholic Mysticism. At the Roman College, where he dwelt when reaping the final fruits of his long life of union with God, a small balcony leading out of his private chamber is still shown to his pilgrim sons. It was here that the Saint found the greatest happiness during the night watches, gazing upon the star-lit firmament, his heart absorbed in thinking on God's vastness and wisdom and the brightness of His face. But here we have a method of prayer which at first sight does not depend upon any attention to the mysteries of the word Incarnate.

Again, there was St. Francis with his birds; St. Antony with the fishes, St. John of the Cross with his poems, and we could find an infinite variety of instances to prove that the Saints and mystics were great lovers of nature and of the God of nature. For the matter of that, did not Our Lord himself argue from the lilies and the sparrows to the Providence of God?

Therefore, let our meaning not be misapprehended when we distinguish between the Mysticism

of Christians and the Mysticism of those who are not such. The difference between their prayer does not necessarily import any difference in the subject considered.

The Christian and the pagan both may be absorbed in the thought of God, His oneness, His nature, and all His attributes. But God is not really the same thing to both: for he is differently known. By nature he is known vaguely, imperfectly. The pagan surmises many things about God, but his sources of knowledge are too remote, too devious, to supply him with the same kind of knowledge of God that he has of God's creatures;—whereas the faith of a Christian is precise, ample, steadfast, unhesitating; and though it is not necessarily as poignant as are sense-impressions, it is conferred by God as a foretaste of the direct vision of the Blessed.

Hence whatever be the immediate subject of a Christian's prayer, it is necessarily colored by his faith, and to such an extent as to make it, even on this ground, something specifically distinct. To know God as a very dear friend is essentially different from knowing him as a philosophical truth. In fact this difference between Christian and pagan prayer is so obvious that, were it not for the importance of making the matter clear, we might have hesitated to insist upon it at length.

Anyhow we need now but say that the nearer a Christian mystic gets to God, the God who has not merely created him, but redeemed him at the cost

of much suffering, the more eager does he become to feed his mind upon the omnipotence and eternal beauty of the Divinity as revealed by created forms. But such a view of his prayer does not imply that, psychologically, his contemplation is of the same order as that of a Greek or a Hindu. There is much difference between a real orange and a painted one, and Christ did not come for nothing.

But now we are met by a different stumbling-block. Suppose we assume that the Catholic mystic possess a soul saturated with Catholic doctrine and devotion, and that this fact must necessarily change the whole nature of his contemplation. Does not that seem to imply that there must be present to his mind a multiplicity of details regarding what God has revealed? And if so, how does his prayer escape being discursive? This point must be considered somewhat fully, because any sound theory of divine contemplation must maintain and elucidate the distinction between ordinary and mystic prayer quite as much as between what is natural and supernatural. Therefore, with a view to making the conditions of this problem clear to the reader, we shall consider some of those distinctive points of revealed truth which are likely to form the ground-work of Catholic contemplation.

To take first the question of Divine Providence. Natural reason would lead to the hope that God exercises some sort of care of his creatures. Cath-

olic faith teaches that God certainly extends to us a minute and generous attention. According to Isaias,[1] "though a woman should forget her infant, so as not to have pity upon him, yet God will not forget Sion. Behold I have graven thee in my hands; thy walls are ever before my eyes." Again Our Lord said: [2] "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, yet they labour not, neither do they spin; . . . how much more you, O ye of little faith? Seek not what you shall eat or what you shall drink. . . . Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." This view of a detailed Providence exercised over God's children, so strongly impressed on them by their faith, enables Catholics to hold a personal and filial attitude towards their Creator which, without revelation, would be, so far as we can understand, impossible of attainment.

But what enhances the Catholic feeling of intimate dependence upon God as a friend and father, is his knowledge of the Eucharistic presence. And this knowledge is undoubtedly at the present day strongly stamping the character of Catholic Mysticism. I am thinking mainly, but not exclusively, of contemplative orders of nuns, among whom devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, especially as connected with the practice of perpetual adoration, has been spreading rapidly. It is

[1] Ch. XLIX, 15.
[2] S. Luke XII, 2.

hardly too much to say that we can discern a special tendency to base mystical prayer upon the Sacramental Presence of Christ upon his Altars. It is of course quite clear that such Eucharistic devotion need not exclude direct contemplation of the Divine Nature, since it is of faith that in the Blessed Sacrament this is present after a peculiar manner. Yet it remains true that Souls who seek God in his sacramental presence are thereby kept in constant remembrance of all the Church's faith about the Incarnation and their mystical adoration cannot but receive from it a special colouring. Nor is this Divine Presence in the Tabernacle only. In communion the contemplative receives God into his heart, and among religious and interior persons daily communion is, we may say, now universal. The Soul, in feeding upon its Eucharistic God, becomes inured to the habit of a wonderfully intimate and quasi-miraculous union with the Divinity. This relation is so profound that mystical writers in trying to describe it find their ingenuity exhausted and can only call on us to adore the wisdom and mercy which devises such a mode of union. They do not intend to blur the belief, which is common to all theists as well as Christians, that God is everywhere present with his creatures by essence, intelligence, and power. But such a belief can but be merely intellectual and abstract compared with a living faith in the doctrine of transubstantiation which makes its im-

mediate appeal to the heart and the imagination.

As being closely connected with Eucharistic devotion we may here allude to the revelations of the Sacred Heart at Paray. In recent years the attention of the whole Catholic Church, but more especially of contemplative souls, has been increasingly centred upon the adorable Heart of the Man-God. It is not necessary to our purpose to define the reasons why this devotion has a peculiar attraction for mystics, nor to distinguish carefully its êthos from the older forms[1] of Eucharistic worship. We are merely concerned with the patent fact that the influence of the revelations upon the whole Church has been enormous, and that the wide extension of this devotion must have the greatest effect upon interior souls beyond all others. It would probably not be far off the mark to aver that the obvious and generally recognised increase of Mysticism in the Catholic body is due, among other causes, to spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart.[2] Moreover, if we study the message delivered through the Virgin of Paray we shall find that it is particularly addressed to reli-

[1] When we imply that the devotion of the S. Heart is due to the revelation accorded to S. Margaret Mary, we are not forgetful that it existed prior to them, but it was known to comparatively few.

[2] The more visible effects of the devotion are those which appear among the mass of Catholic populations, but it is not difficult and perfectly sound to argue from results which are externally apparent to those which are from their nature somewhat more hidden.

gious persons. The following passage will illustrate our meaning:[1]

"One day after Holy Communion He showed me a rugged crown made of nineteen sharp thorns, which pierced His Divine Head. I felt so lively a sorrow that I could speak to him only by my tears. He told me that He had come to seek me, that I might pluck out the thorns which had been thus deeply buried in His Head by a faithless Spouse. 'She pierces my brain with thorns as often as in her pride she prefers herself to me.'"

Our concern however is merely with the spirit of devotion to the S. Heart as affecting the prayer of mystical souls. It is above all a spirit of intense familiarity and union with God, leading to self-immolation, but mainly consisting of passionate love. The records of St. Margaret Mary should be carefully compared with the words of Christ as related by St. John, and it will be found that the two documents are in absolute accord. The newer revelation merely expresses in clearer symbols and perhaps in stronger language the principles already communicated to the Church by the Evangelist of Love. The prayer for the disciples contains the following words:[2] "I pray that they may all be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . and the glory which thou hast given me I have

[1] From Father Tickell's *Life of Blessed Margaret Mary* (*ed.* 1890), p. 115.

[2] St. John XVII, 21–4.

given to them, that they may be one as we also are one; and the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast also loved me." Could human words express a closer union of hearts? The effect is all the more striking because evidently the speaker is thinking immediately of the union of Christians among themselves; he brings in their union with God as, so to speak, an illustration of his argument, and as a means of promoting human charity:—"that they may be *one in us as I am in thee and thou in me.*"

The whole tendency of our Lord's discourse is in this direction. A few quotations hardly convey the full effect, but we may note the familiar words:[1] "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him, . . . and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." We may compare with this a passage in the Apocalypse:[2] "If any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me: to him that shall overcome I will give to sit with me in my throne, *as I also have overcome and am set down with my Father in his throne.*" Here again is an intimacy expressed as a sort of equality between Christ and his children.

Besides adopting the language already familiar to his hearers from their own Sacred Books, our

[1] St. John XIV, 21–3.
[2] Apoc. III, 20–1.

Lord continually speaks of himself as the Spouse of human souls. He says, for instance:[1] "Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the day will come, when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they shall fast." And one of the seven Angels in the Apocalypse says,[2] "Come and I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb," again:[3] "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath prepared herself. And it is granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen, glittering and white: for the fine linen are the justifications of the Saints."

Thus, when we draw attention to the devotion to the S. Heart as being a special source of the mystical union of souls with Christ, and one whose influence makes for the spread of mysticism in the Church, we desire to emphasise the fact that such a tendency is not really a novel thing. Our point is that for Catholic mystics the very ground-work of their contemplation has always been the consciousness that they are in very truth the spouses of Jesus, who now beckons them to take refuge in the recesses of his Heart. As a final extract from the writings of St. Margaret Mary we add one[4]

[1] St. Matt. IX, 15.
[2] Chap. XXI, 9.
[3] Chap. XIX, 7–8.
[4] *Ib.*, p. 121.

which proves the intimacy of the union to which this mystic was personally invited:

"I make you heiress of my Heart and of all its treasures for time and eternity, allowing you to use them according to your desire, and I promise that you shall fail to receive assistance only when my Heart shall want power to give it you. You shall be for ever Its beloved Disciple, the sport of Its good pleasure, and the victim of Its wishes. It shall be the sole delight of all your desires; It will repair and supply for your defects, and discharge your obligations for you." The Saint assures us that Our Lord dictated this donation of His S. Heart, which she wrote in her own blood, after dedicating herself to Him in a mystical will or deed which she had persuaded her Superior to draw up on her behalf.

We will also add a single extract from the revelations to a mystic of our own day, Sister Mary of the S. Heart, a nun of the Good Shepherd congregation. Towards the end of the 19th century this holy woman carried further the work instituted at Paray, being instrumental in obtaining from Leo XIII the consecration of the whole world to the S. Heart. Two years before her death on the Feast of the S. Heart (June 25th 1897) she wrote:[1]

"Our Lord told me to-day that he chose me anew for the beloved spouse of His Heart and that he

[1] L. Chasle, *Sister Mary of the Divine Heart* (Burns & Oates), p. 258.

placed the treasures of his Heart at my disposal . . . 'I count you among the number of my most cherished spouses, and my eyes have rested upon you because of your great weakness and misery, which makes my love shine all the brighter. Just as a father and a mother feel a very special love for their sick child, so I have chosen you in spite of your misery.' "

These instances are abundant to throw light upon the character of supernatural as distinct from natural contemplation, at least in our own day. They are taken, it is true, from the record of persons who may rank as spiritual giants, by which we mean canonized Saints and others marked out by Heaven for exceptional favours. But if we find among such persons that their contemplation and the revelations granted them relate closely to such topics as the sacramental system, or devotions to the God Incarnate, we can feel no scruple about applying the same principle to those humbler mystics who, like fledgelings from the nest, are only learning to spread their wings to the heavenly breezes.

There is also another devotion to which it will be of avail to turn our minds, one also peculiarly adapted to promote a mystical spirit, the love of the Holy Ghost. This too is specially characteristic of the Church of to-day, and we must consider whether it has not a special bearing on our subject. It is quite evident that such a devotion which as it were ushers the soul who cultivates it

into the immediate presence of God itself, must create a special atmosphere of its own, and indeed must be of a peculiarly mystical nature. When it follows this path, the soul looks to a Divine Person for a sort of immediate guidance and illumination in prayer and in all the actions of life, keeping the heart centred in God himself and aflame with love for Him and alert with a desire to become so united with Him as to effect by His grace a real transformation of the spirit.

This third Divine Person is, it must be granted, the last in procession and the furthest from the primal fount of Divinity, the nearest to creatures (inasmuch as like the Divine Spirit they proceed from Divine Love). Yet what matters all that? Faith teaches that in Divine Perfection and Power all the Persons are equal; and that as far as concerns any action of God upon creatures we must never explain it by the distinction between Divine Persons,[1] but by their common action proceeding from a common nature.

Would it, therefore, be true to conclude from the doctrine of the Trinity that a Catholic mystic, whose contemplation takes the form of devotion to the Holy Ghost, does not depend in his prayer upon the Sacred Humanity of Christ and the body of truth which It revealed? Certainly not. Quite independently of the fact that Trinitarian doctrine

[1] Always accepting the fact of the Incarnation, which is peculiar to one Person and is not shared by the other Persons through concomitance.

can nowise be grasped except through supernatural faith, no devotion is more directly based upon Christ's explicit teaching than that to the Third Person. The words of Christ to his Disciples immediately before his Passion make it clear that the special function of the Holy Ghost is to continue the work of the Incarnation (which by the way was wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost); and that He designs in some sense to take the place of Christ and to represent Him while He is visibly withdrawn from our ken. He said:[1] "It is expedient for you that I go; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. . . . But when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will teach you all truth, for he shall not speak of himself."

It comes, therefore, to this, that devotion to the Holy Ghost is put before us as a legacy of Jesus, and that our principal motive for cultivating it is to be the conviction that Jesus desires us so to do, and that, therefore, we shall try to feel towards His representative as we would feel towards Himself, and that He regards our love and devotion for the Third Person of the Trinity as something lavished upon Himself. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand how the Redeemer could have said that it is better for us that he should go away. He did not mean that he relinquished one jot or tittle of our affection, as though love lavished upon one of the Divine Persons is sub-

[1] St. John XVI, 7–13.

tracted from the others. Thus is the essential unity of God brought home to our minds and hearts.

Therefore, whichever way we turn in our enquiry, we find everything pointing to a single conclusion, namely, that Catholic contemplation actually flows from the Incarnation; and that the reason is that such prayer consists of a kind of knowledge and love of God which presupposes Christian f. ith. So we may now return to the difficulty which we have already indicated, namely, how can the Catholic mystic base his contemplation upon the mysteries of Christ, his history, his sacraments, his teaching, his desires, and at the same time be fixed purely and nakedly upon the essential attributes of God? And if Catholic prayer appears to require attention to a multiplicity of details and thus practically to involve discourse of the faculties,—how can it also be called contemplation in the sense intended by all our mystical writers?

These questions will solve themselves if we invoke the aid of psychology. Modern research is always harping upon the unconscious or subconscious processes of the mind, but in reality the matter is familiar to simple persons. Surely we are all perfectly aware that our mind is full of knowledge which often may be nearly dormant, and yet may affect our action considerably. A good instance of this law is found in the psychology of art-production, and to illustrate my meaning, I

will refer to a case which fell under my personal observation. While watching a friend painting a portrait I happened to notice that when he caught some feature of his subject and was transferring it to his canvas his own features were changing. His eyes gleamed and seemed to start, his whole face lit up, and, in a word, he was so possessed with his effort as to appear for a moment as one transformed. Thinking over the phenomenon I ventured, when opportunity arose, to ask him whether he thought at all about his palette or his brush work while painting portraits. As I expected, he replied, "Certainly not;—I hardly know what colors I am mixing. I see the face before me, I am intent on reproducing it: I think only of it—the brush works by itself." So he had looked, as I thought. Yet can a brush work by itself? The truth is, all his life he had been studying the pigments, their values in combination, and his mind was saturated with them and their usage. He could not paint unless his training were mature,—which means that his training allows him now to do what is mechanically required without dissipating on it his mental energy. He has learned to work automatically. We need not delay to remind the reader that if we were considering the great world-artists whose souls were fired by sublime religious or patriotic ideals far beyond anything which is reached by the avenues of the senses, we should find automatism carried farther than in the case of a portrait painter of to-day.

We take it that the case of divine contemplation is not dissimilar. The eye of the mystic is fixed upon absolute beauty and truth, and his faculties, so far as their conscious activity is concerned, remain suspended. But all the time they are continuing to do their work, and to do it better on account of their automatism. We must not forget that contemplation, though called passive, is in reality a vital and, therefore, an active operation. Almost without the power to perceive it, the intellect is really revolving about what it knows, what it believes. It is turned with all its force to God himself, but it is to the God of love, God who has revealed himself in the Incarnation and in the Catholic Church.

Thus any apparent contradiction is resolved. The activity we are considering is not the same as the discourse of the mystical authorities. In mystic prayer there may be remembering, feeling, reasoning, willing; but such acts are neither fully deliberate nor always fully conscious. The theory is simple enough, but it goes down so deeply to the very roots of our subject that we should like to refer here to what is perhaps the closest analogy to divine contemplation, namely, the attitude of earthly lovers. God has likened Himself to a royal lover, who chooses to entertain himself with a mere slave, yet on terms of perfect equality and tender familiarity. Would such a slave-lover not be conscious of her sovereign's dignity and greatness, all his achievements as well as his present

condescension? If he had in the past given special signs of his love, for instance, if he had drawn her out of misery or even degradation, would not this knowledge give a special color to her love, even at the moment when he has summoned her to the royal presence and to dalliance? Yet her conscious state is properly not one of reflection and mental discourse. Her only concern is that her lover is present and is expressing his love. She belongs to him and he to her,—that is all her deliberate thinking. This is a true picture of Mysticism, drawn not by us, but by the King Himself.

For in the Canticle of Canticles[1] the Divine Lover says to his Spouse: "Show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears, for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely," and she replies: "My beloved to me and I to him who feedeth among the lilies." When she says:[2] "His left hand under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me," He replies: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awake my love till she please."

Not merely ardent love, but ordinary friendship will help us to form a notion of the mystical life. That is to say, merely to be associated on terms of familiarity with a friend is to learn all about him, all the shades of his character, and this without the least effort. The mystic strives to be a friend

[1] Chap. II, 14–6.
[2] *Ib.*, VIII, 3–4.

of God, and is continually finding out new things about him, seeing him in new lights, not mainly by meditation in a methodic sense, but rather by a sort of personal association. There is, however, a difference. Human lovers grow fonder as they see in the beloved fresh points of beauty. But they are also likely to see human defects, for there are drawbacks in all human characters, it may be serious ones. Passionate lovers may deceive themselves into believing that they love those very defects, perhaps they do for a moment,—but after all no creature is absolute perfection, no creature can entirely and finally satisfy the longings of the human heart. In God there are no drawbacks, though at times of stress we dare to question this;—but at least it is true that the more we know of God the more we love Him. Mysticism is entirely based upon this truth.

We hope that we have made it clear in what sense Christian mystical prayer cannot be termed discursive. The work of the contemplative is to keep the eye of his soul riveted upon God. If his faculties go to work in the way we have called subconscious, if his memory, his understanding, sometimes even his imagination, remain active, this is no affair of his. Thoughts may and will come, from divine inspiration or from some deep psychological cause he cannot fathom, nor does it matter. His aim is to remain close to the Divine Spirit, to be lost in Him, to have no thought for the course his prayer may take, so long as it keeps him folded in the divine

embraces. In one sense his prayer may be discursive, because his intelligence is quickened by faith and the thoughts suggested by faith. He is not really asleep, however much he may try, with God's help, to lull his faculties by recollection of God's presence. But there is no effort to obtain discourse, no intention to procure it, much less any systematic plan to produce it. But the opposite is precisely what is meant by discursive prayer: it is always something intentionally and systematically discursive. Authorities on meditation are never done laying down rules and methods by which discourse may be assured; we are to use one faculty after another, each in its own way, to obtain discourse and the affections of the will which discourse is intended to foster.

It is not our business here to explain these methods, still less to criticise them. The prayer of discourse, or the use of the faculties, must have its own and proper place in any scheme of contemplation. It is an important exercise for many, especially at an early stage of their spiritual life; and it may be that some persons can never go farther in the direction of freedom and familiarity with God. But this is not our point. It is our only aim at the moment to define the relation between active and passive prayer in regard to those revealed truths which underlie Catholic Mysticism. The contemplation of Christians, as we hope we have succeeded in making clear, differs utterly from that of pagans, not merely in its supernatural

origin, but also in its supernatural content. Contemplation consists of knowledge and of love. The knowledge of Christians about God depends on the revelation which He has given them, and their love of God is colored accordingly.

CHAPTER VI.

Further Description of Mystical Prayer.

In the following Chapter, for clarity's sake, we shall deal with only two aspects of mystical prayer, its Passivity (which we have already touched upon in our last Chapter) and its Obscurity.

We have already said that it is the quality of "Passivity" which marks off mystical from ordinary prayer, and we have even given some faint indication of what is implied by the term; but it will now be necessary to give, as far as possible, a clearer definition of its meaning. Inasmuch as all supernatural gifts and graces are infused by the Holy Ghost into the soul, and as the gift of prayer, as a Christian prays, is certainly supernatural, God always co-operates by his supernatural power in our prayer. This is what St. Paul means when he says:[1] "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but this Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings," and he makes this doctrine still clearer when he writes:[2] "No man can say (*dicere*) Lord Jesus,

[1] Rom. VIII, 26.
[2] 1 Cor. XII, 3.

but by the Holy Ghost." It would be nonsense to declare that the words could not be physically uttered;—but they cannot be uttered, as a Christian utters them, *i. e.,* with true and supernatural faith, except by the immediate action of God the Sanctifier. Now if all Christian prayer requires a special infusion of God's grace, it follows that all such prayer may be said in a true sense to contain a "passive" element of a supernatural sort. But when we use the term with its technical meaning, as when we affirm that passivity is the true test of Christian contemplation, as distinct from ordinary meditation, we clearly mean more than the infusion of an actual grace into the soul. Let us try to disentangle the "mystical" sense of passivity.

I take it, then, that prayer is called Passive when the supernatural or Passive element in it so prevails over the exercise of the ordinary faculties of the mind that the latter appear to be and really are relatively dormant. Contrariwise, insofar as the activities of the soul are normally active (and especially if they are felt to be under the complete or ordinary control of the will, so that the action of divine grace is rather supposed than felt), the prayer is Active, or what is termed Discursive. In proportion as the deliberate use of one's psychology is suspended, whether by conscious desire or by the influence of divine grace, the prayer becomes less active; and it is only when the faculties are notably quiescent, as far as our consciousness goes, that we can speak of Passive Prayer. For

now, if *indeed there is any prayer at all,* it will be at least incipiently of a mystical character. It is most important to understand that all through it is question of less and more, and that there is and can be no prayer which is wholly passive, any more than there can be any (supernatural) prayer which does not contain some element or germ of passivity.

One reserve must, however, be made here in regard to the more advanced stages of Mysticism, namely, that in the ecstasy or rapture which is truly supernatural in origin (though also conditioned by temperament), the will is carried away as though by violence. In such a case deliberation is out of the question, and it will seem as though the mental faculties have wholly ceased to operate. This is not really the case:—they are quickened to an intense vitality by the divine touch, although the will has lost, or almost lost, its usual sense of control.

In the earlier and more familiar stage of contemplation there may be a risk (though not possibly so great as is sometimes imagined) of mistaking remissness for true passivity. This is a matter for directors and hardly concerns the theoretical problems we are discussing. Still it will do no harm to remark, first, that Passive prayer is not for all, and secondly that those who attempt it usually find it an arduous employment. Though it undoubtedly has a negative side, yet it implies a very intense concentration of the soul upon God

and upon the movements of his gracious co-operation.

It is hardly desirable here to omit a reference to the Prayer of Simplicity, which was powerfully advocated by the late Father Poulain, S. J., and has thereby derived a considerable notoriety.[1] We could hardly speak too highly of this great writer, who had unusual practical experience upon which he built up a work which is scholarly and almost monumental. Besides, in our time the influence of the book has been immense and wholly beneficial, and no one has more cause than the present writer to think and speak respectfully of the great French Jesuit. But there is, I think, a very general consensus among the admirers of Père Poulain, that his treatment of the Prayer of Simplicity, to which he attached great importance (and not without reason), is on its theoretical side somewhat misleading. It is one thing to point out that the sort of prayer which he describes often forms a natural and useful transition from discursive prayer to contemplation; and quite another to appear to maintain that there is a well-defined and prevalent form of prayer which is neither discursive nor contemplative, or, as we might say, neither Active nor Passive. True there may be and must be a border line for individuals, and to point this out might be most beneficial in encouraging beginners to advance. But in theory it is

[1] *Les Graces d'Oraison:* see especially appendix (ed. 1906), p. 44. "Existence et Nature de l'Oraison de Simplicité."

necessary, unless we want to be lost in hopeless confusion, to state firmly that, as soon as one ceases to use discourse of the faculties, so soon one's prayer begins to be passive and one is really entering upon the mystic road.[1] Our progress may be slow, it may be halting, but there we are—and it is just as well to know the fact.

Can we not derive from mystics themselves any clear notion of "passivity" in prayer? They certainly do not write about it as though it were something wholly negative. In the first place, they speak of a strenuous effort to rid the faculties, the memory included, of all distracting thoughts, whether good or bad, and to fix them upon God alone. Yet this very effort must be moderate, and in a sense quiet, or it might frustrate itself. Contemplatives tell us that very soon they find out that to pray for a long time without distractions of any sort is impossible (except indeed by a special grace, which is rarely granted in the earlier stages of mystical prayer). The soul knows that it is distracted, that it must be; what it learns is not to pray without distractions, but to pray in spite of them or perhaps with the help of them. If this sounds paradoxical, let it be, for what is there in the theory of Mysticism which is not paradoxical?

The efforts of the mystic stop at clearing his

[1] On the point we may refer to Prof J. W. Howley, *Psychology and Mystical Experience* (pp. 214 foll.), who treats the subject fully and with lucidity.

faculties of distracting interests. He cannot of his own power grasp God as he seeks him. He could try to think about God, that would be to fall back upon the prayer of the faculties, which, in so far as he tends towards mysticism, he avoids. If, however, some thought or affection drawing him to God comes to his spirit spontaneously, without any effort of the will, or deliberate act of any faculty, he may or may not notice this movement. Should he do so, he may reasonably hope that such a movement, in which he seems as though he had not part, may be the effect of divine grace. St. Ignatius in the *Exercises* [1] is very clear about this. He says: "it belongs to God alone to give the soul consolation *without any preceding cause,* because it is the peculiar part of the Creator to enter the soul, to leave it, to cause movement within it . . . By 'without a cause' I mean without any previous feeling or thought of any object owing to which such consolation could come to the soul by the acts of its intelligence or will." In this Rule the Founder expresses the central idea of all mystical theology.

When we attempt to explain in the concrete what is meant by Passive prayer, as contrasted with the use of the Faculties, we may describe it as consisting in a special exercise of the Presence of God. That is to say, the soul gives up every other thought, affection, reflection, action, and intention, in order to rivet its attention upon God

[1] *Regulae ad pleniorem spirituum discretionem,* No. 2.

alone, God intimately present within the soul's centre. No doubt those who so strive believe that God by his grace will in his own way move the soul to a subtle kind of activity, to something which is not really its own. Thus the soul as it were strives to lose control of its action, in order that it may be more free to follow the prompting of grace. Freedom is of the essence of Passive Prayer, but it is equally true that even this Freedom must not be the immediate object sought. Again and again we repeat the soul must seek God alone. God and his nature, his attributes, his Providence, his love is the object of contemplation. The Freedom of which we treat is but a means to this end. Now in practice the faculties will be, must be, in some sense active. That is obvious, for otherwise we should simply be raising a psychological paradox.

To keep the faculties fixed upon God alone without consciously directed activity, is at best a difficult thing. In the case of those who are only beginning to be versed in contemplation, various aspirations, either vocal or at least mental, will constantly arise. Sometimes, if not generally, with the first efforts at this enjoyment of God's Presence vocal prayer of a sort will constantly intervene. And this intimate connection between vocal prayer or aspiratory prayer and the beginning of contemplation is fully recognised by St. Ignatius, and strongly recommended in his so-called Second and Third methods of prayer.

Hence persons that are told, as they are often told by directors, to keep their mind *fixed upon God's Presence and to make aspirations* are really being led towards the beginnings of Passive Prayer.

The further point is this. A time will probably come sooner or later when the soul can wean itself by degrees even from the shackles of aspiratory prayer in any very definite sense. I mean from saying (with St. Francis of Assisi) repeatedly words like "My Lord and my God!" or "Sweet Heart of Jesus make me love thee better!" The soul can learn by degrees to be silent in the presence of God and thus to become a Contemplative in the true sense. At one stage it may protest "I wish to say nothing, to think of nothing, I wish to ask nothing, I do not desire anything, I wish to do nothing—I wish to be before thee like a beggar, or like a worm of earth as I am. I am not here to get anything for myself, or even to intercede for others. I wish to be present with thee, to adore thee, to gaze upon thee, to be left to thee to do with me *even in my prayer* whatever thou dost thyself decree."

Something like this no doubt was meant by Père Poulain when he treated of the Prayer of Simplicity. He desired to distinguish between this state of prayer and what he considered was mystical prayer at its highest.

All we desire to maintain here is that such an attitude of mind in prayer as we have attempted

to describe is truly a Passive attitude, and is therefore mystical in its essence.

There is, however, one proviso which had better be laid down at once. Mystical writers are continually referring to the action of God in the human soul, and Passivity means laying oneself open to the action of God. But God acts, if I may say so, psychologically:—that is, his action on the faculty is also a vital act of the faculty itself. So in the Beatific Vision:—it is a miracle of God's Mercy, but it is real vision, that is a vital and human though supernatural act.

Therefore, it is in the concrete extremely difficult to detect the action of God. We may see or feel a result which we may prudently judge to be due to God's action alone. It is true in certain cases, we are told, that God works so clearly, so strongly, that he leaves no room for doubt of his direct action within the soul. But these cases are exceptional and as such somewhat beyond our scope. We are dealing with mystical prayer as it is ordinarily experienced by every-day people. That God infuses virtue supernaturally into Christian souls from their Baptism is a matter of Faith. In this process ordinary sanctification requires infinite power, but the power is applied according to regular fixed laws; we may call it God's ordinary action in Christian souls.

Now the question arises, when we speak of God acting upon the soul of the Mystic,—Do we nec-

essarily refer to a kind of action which is regular and according to fixed laws, or do we necessarily imply a special personal kind of action such as He exercises when He gives extraordinary illuminations, visions or special revelations?

In order to give some answer to this most important question we will consider the matter from a more general standpoint, namely, the universal action of God upon His creatures in the order of nature. All Christians, and even Theists, believe that God exercises some kind of Providence over the world, which has, in fact, a twofold aspect. There is the General Providence which may be almost viewed as another name for the laws of nature and of grace, considered collectively. But there is an almost universal belief that God also exercises a particular Providence at least over human beings.[1] Our Lord's teaching as to the prayers of his own followers is very clear and explicit. He said: "Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name he will give you." [2] This seems to suppose that God is watching his creatures and is constantly exercising a special Providence over them. Hence we are accustomed to pray to God with confidence that he will do what is best for us, and even answer our requests, unless of course

[1] We are not here considering how far the action of God's particular Providence is necessarily Supernatural (in the strict theological sense). The reader may remember that this has been treated already in Chap. III.

[2] St. John XVI, 23.

they are for any reason contrary to his will. But although we believe in God's particular Providence, especially in favor of those who invoke it, we do not pretend in ordinary cases to know with certainly that God is really changing his dispensations in our behalf. It is enough for us to know that he often does so, and that in any case where his general Providence would not suffice, he is both able and willing to aid us, even perhaps to the extent of working a miracle.

In mystical prayer I take it the case is similar. We believe that God is constantly moving our hearts to pray, giving us lights and inspirations, filling us with his spirit, and drawing us to himself. How much of this action is due to the ordinary effect of his supernatural grace upon our faculties, and how far it is the result of a more particular kind of intimacy, is not made known to us, nor is it necessary that it should be, so long as we are being led by the ordinary paths of sanctity. Extraordinary gifts are in a different category and might cause us much hesitation in speaking of them,—if we were disposed to treat of them, but we are not. Our enquiry relates to ordinary sanctification and the Mysticism of the Ordinary Way. We feel God's presence and his grace; but how far that is due to our own psychology, always is acted upon by God's infused graces, and how far to some more special dispensations of the divine goodness, is known to God alone. Let us leave it to him to direct us as he sees best.

This question of the divine action enters so deeply into our subject that it may be well to consider a concrete illustration. We may refer to a recent French mystic, Marie de la Trinité,[1] who has written down her experience in the Dark Night. After a period of suffering she saw gleams of light as from faint stars in a dark sky. This experience was not in her senses of course, but in the intellect, or rather (as she expresses it), "dans le fond de mon âme." The expression "light" is not entirely metaphorical; it expresses anyhow a psychological fact, and one which the writer certainly thought to be supernatural, for it proved to be the harbinger of a new era of peace and of silent growth, accompanied also by a feeling of consolation. In the case of a well-trained and thoroughly tried mystic to attribute this experience to the action in some way of the Holy Ghost will be almost inevitable, especially if a disciple of St. Ignatius. It is one of this master's leading principles that the Divine Spirit "enters the soul quietly and without any conscious preparation [2] on the part of the contemplative," and that he brings with him peace and a certain feeling of holy joy, due to an increase of Faith and the other theological virtues in which sanctification mainly consists. Thus

[1] Called "Consummata" by her biographer, Père Plus, S. J. (Toulouse, 1921). We shall return to this subject later.

[2] The Saint would not, we believe, exclude the negative preparation which consists in freeing the soul from distractions and inordinate affections. But God's action on the soul is often sudden and unexpected.

the Good Spirit reaches the deepest part of the soul, not the surface merely, and those who have even a slight acquaintance with Passive prayer, soon learn instinctively to recognise the power and sweetness of grace. "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world [or self-love] gives it do I give it unto you," says the Divine Master. The question which at once stares us in the face is, whether we must necessarily attribute these movements of peace and joy and fortitude which come in the ordinary course of contemplation and are certainly a mark of God's presence in the soul, to any sort of *special* dispensation of Divine Providence? May we not believe that, when the soul is quiet and watchful, recollected as well as may be in the thought of God, its natural powers,—aided no doubt by those actual supernatural aids which God in his *ordinary* action upon Christian souls is ready to bestow,—may be at times quite sufficient to produce results which startle the soul by their very suddenness? He should be a brave writer who would attempt to solve such questions dogmatically. It is our aim merely to state the conditions of contemplative prayer, as made known to us by reason or revelation. We dare assert nothing beyond the fact that God is a Hidden God, that he does not permit his creatures to penetrate the secrets of his loving action in their regard. He does not wish profane ears to overhear his silences. We are safe in saying that the souls of man are in his

hand, the souls of mystics in his bosom, and we must be cautious. When we speak of God's action in the souls of men we must not seem to assert that such action must necessarily be what we call in our parlance something "out of the way." It may be so, and it often is so. That is what we may assert.

As we premised, there is now to be discussed another characteristic of supernatural contemplation by which it can be discerned. All mystics, we believe, agree that the knowledge of God which comes in and through their prayer can best be described as a Darkness. If they see light, it is because as Isaias says,[1] "God's light shall rise up in darkness, and his darkness shall be as the noon-day." It is here above all that contemplative souls find it impossible to describe clearly their experience. But anyone acquainted, for instance, with the works of St. John of the Cross will remember that a large part is played in them by the Dark Night of the sense, or of the spirit. This phrase does not merely imply that mystics have to pass through much desolation; the Dark Night is something substantial, it is, so to speak, of the essence of all mystical prayer, whether made in desolation or the reverse.

What is the Dark Night? I take it to mean that the soul, in looking for God, sees a blank. It cannot attain yet to the fulness of Vision, and not seeing God it must see nothing, for it has de-

[1] Ch. LVIII, 10.

liberately expelled all thought or care of creatures. In the very nothing it finds its joy, painful but real joy,—its rest,—its relief. It cannot be satisfied (for it is not in Heaven), yet it finds a deeper satisfaction in this absence of all than in any joy which creatures could confer. But why multiply words? The thing is inexpressible, it has never been expressed even by a Teresa, an Angustine, a Bernard.

The Dark Night is not God, but it eloquently tells of God. Well does the soul know when it gazes into this blankness that God is there, hidden behind it, far more really, if I may say so, than he is in creatures. Creatures have nothing to do with the Absolute, they are weak and puny things; —the dark night is great, anyhow it has no limitations, nor does it cause distractions. It is not God, for it is nothing; and yet it seems to suggest the thought of God. When the soul enters on this Dark Night, it is in a good way, it does not suffer from illusions, it learns humility, the abyss calleth to the Abyss. Thus the note of Obscurity in prayer is important for the contemplative, almost as important as the note of Passivity. Any person who finds himself in the Dark Night, and can remain there at peace for a length of time,— without any desire for such light as he could obtain elsewhere,—can surely become a mystic if he is not one already. Suppose one to be started on this road with marks of a genuine attraction to contemplation (possibly confirmed by the judg-

ment of a wise superior or director), there will be a strong conviction of the presence of God, his active assistance and guidance, and a bold confidence that he will crown the beginner's efforts with perseverance.

In this sense the grace of God is securely realized; but when we come to individual impulses of the Spirit, it remains (as we already indicated) difficult for the mystic to distinguish between what is attributable to grace and what to his own psychology. As people progress in prayer, they should become more and more illuminated as to inspirations which are divine, and not rooted in their own spirit. But there can be no infallible test of spirituality except the effects which are wrought by it. Persons who are known to be highly virtuous, humble, obedient, and prayerful, earn our respect. If in any particular case they are convinced that they have received a divine inspiration (though not necessarily of a miraculous sort), our attitude would be that in some sense they are probably right. But we need not to remind them that even the greatest Saints were hardly immune from the possibility of illusion when they attributed their experience to the Divine Spirit. Thus the humility of mystics is safeguarded, even though their infallibility is not guaranteed.

Let us then suppose the case of one who is being drawn after an incipient manner to true and mystical contemplation. He finds that the use of

his discursive faculties, to which he has been accustomed in his meditation, is less and less satisfying: it is fast becoming practically impossible. The longing to be with God is growing, and yet he cannot now think about him in the way of reasoning upon his attributes or mysteries, still less of forming definite resolutions of other acts of the will. Even petitions to God do not quite express what he wants. It was different before, he prayed with facility and even consolation along lines in which his soul cannot now travel. When he tries to meditate, he feels as though he were dead. The soul is plunged, not merely in actual desolation, though it feels that acutely enough, but the whole thing is like a blank. The soul is now a prey to every distracting thought and image and reflection. It finds no fixed point in any mystery, it cannot grasp the mysteries, they have lost their power, their message. They are as though they were not.

Now instead of giving way to querulousness, to despondency, to scruples, and to distractions, such a person should simply throw himself upon God, cease to think, cease to struggle as it has been struggling. What, says somebody, am I then to give up, to resign myself to inaction? Yes, and no! You are going to give up the old effort to meditate with your imagination or your reason. You are going to fix all the powers of your soul valiantly upon one thing only, that is God,—God with you,—God within you. It will really be an

intense activity, but it will be in the higher part of the soul, and you will not be conscious of it, as you were of the old struggle to meditate discursively.

You will simply wait upon God, wait for his inspirations and motions. This means a severe concentration of heart and mind, it means a determined effort to recall the soul from every thought of creatures that may distract. It will be possible to make such an effort and to make it quietly and with a certain self-possession, which will gradually restore you to yourself and to prayer. It will not be exactly easy, there is nothing lazy about it, but there is peace and even a joy in the utter abandonment of the soul to God alone. This cannot be fully expressed in words and never will be.

Your soul has a new orientation. It is not now oppressed because it cannot reach the points, or make certain acts which have been recommended, or in any way carry on discourse or resolve. It has now to fix itself upon God alone. And what does it find? A black blankness.

It is entering upon its first mystical experience; it is entering the Dark Night of the Sense. It sees nothing, it thinks nothing of itself, it seems to know nothing, it is plunged in nothing. This is the Obscurity in and through which it pleases God to reveal Himself. It is not a blankness in the imagination only,—true, one seems to see blankness almost with the bodily eyes,—but it is in the

whole being. In this Nothing, somehow, the soul feels that God is present, as though a blind and deaf man had an assurance that his beloved is near him, he knows not how, for it is instinct rather than reason. Or it is like the sun behind a cloud, or a presence behind a mist. The obscurity in prayer is not God, for he is light, and yet at times it almost appears as though God himself was not merely *in* the darkness, but that he *is* the Darkness. So he is,—because he is nothing that the soul can know or grasp or have any distinct idea of. To the mystic at this stage nothing is the nearest thing to God, blackness is the nearest thing to light. It is all a paradox, but it is one worth trying to learn.

Then something happens. I will again refer here to the spiritual notes of Marie de la Trinité, who wrote to her director in the end of September 1911: "All light has disappeared and I find myself in the crucible where I still remain. I am enveloped in a great black shroud. . . . I cannot pray, nor think, nor wish, all is too dark and too burning, everything is dying in me, dying without any consolation." [1] About a month later she wrote: "I am come forth from the abyss; I am not yet in the light, but some stars from time to time now pierce my black vault. Without being bright, they are like a distant ray of light." Again a month later: "A luminous thought is come to console me in my agony."

[1] *Loc. cit.*, pp. 140–1.

This "luminous thought" expresses perfectly the breaking of the darkness, be it vault, or shroud, or night. As the soul gazes (on nothingness) and waits and suffers, without noticing it at first, she becomes gradually aware that peace is stealing over her. A thought in the depth of the soul, a movement towards God, a feeling of security or of refreshment or even holy joy is there:—she knows not how or when it came. In this hidden, unearthly, scarcely perceptible change she recognises the presence of God, making His power felt in response to her expectation. St. Ignatius expressly says [1] that we are to recognise such effects of the divine power from the fact that God enters the soul (this is his favorite metaphor) *like water falling on a sponge, i.e.,* noiselessly, without a splash or anything to startle us. This "luminous" thought breaking through the darkness is the sign of God's presence in the soul.

Thus the Darkness, which does not disappear, becomes more bearable, until gradually the soul finds in it her true home, her spiritual atmosphere, as it were. These little lights will shine at times more luminously and more continuously than at other times. But the soul gets accustomed to the Dark, she learns to wait upon God, and a more perfect resignation supervenes than merely active and discursive prayer could possibly arrive at. "Thy Darkness is as the Sun at noon-day." Thus the soul becomes more and more passive as con-

[1] *Reg. ad plen. spirit discret.*, No. 7.

cerns her own quasi-natural [1] activities, and more and more on the alert to correspond with God's grace, which is the truest activity of all.

It may be that the nearness of God will be felt quite acutely at times, at least for a few moments. The soul will then seize the opportunity, with eagerness it is true, but if possible without the least trace of excitement. She addresses God with a holy familiarity, tells him her troubles and difficulties, and may humbly ask some special favour for self or for others. These are moments of light and of consolation: they come usually towards the end rather than at the beginning of prayer.[2] If the consolation is at the centre of the soul, it leaves the soul stronger and more prepared to renew its passage through the Dark Night. One of the deepest kinds of consolation for one beginning contemplation is the knowledge that progress has been made. It is not felt at the time, any more than a young boy can feel growing, but from time to time he rejoices to find that he is outgrowing his garments. So the soul, after converse with God, finds that it has outgrown its old habits of thought and of feeling. What attracted it even lately, is now known to be insipid; what troubled it, is now known to be of no account. Its attitude towards prayer itself is not what it was:—it is becoming more satisfying, less distasteful; the

[1] They are not natural in the theological sense; we are speaking of course comparatively.

[2] Cfr. the *Imit. of Christ*, Bk. IV, Chap. 15.

dryness may remain, but it matters less. Some plants grow best in the Dark, and the Dark Night no longer retains any horror; it is a good thing, let it do its work.

The Dark Night brings not merely consolation, but illumination to the soul. It is in the order of intelligence that God's presence is most securely felt. One's whole mentality is found to be changing, standards of judgment are shifting, the vista of eternity begins to open out, the world is seen in a new perspective. What we call Mysticism is not mistiness. In regard to God's truth it is far more the driving away of a mist. The Dark Night is thus a strengthening medicine for the faculties. Under its influence spiritual things are now felt to be solid four-square facts, rather than a kind of high-sounding proposition without much reference to known existence. The soul becomes, as it were, rooted in God and in God's truth, and it rejoices to know that its spiritual life is being widened and deepened by its experience of the Dark Night.

After a time these thoughts in turn recede and fade away. As the faculties strengthen and the intellect gains a better perspective, the contemplative soul ceases to worry about itself and its progress in prayer. Its passivity increases in the sense that it leaves to the Beloved to provide for its spiritual good, it becomes more and more absorbed in the glory of God, the interests of the Sacred Heart, the success of Catholicity, and the eternal prospects of human souls. It is here that

the Apostolic life, though interior, becomes so entwined with the contemplative that it becomes impossible to dissociate them. The mystic desires the glory of God and says with St. Paul: *"Haec est voluntas Dei, vestra sanctificatio*—This is the will of God, your sanctification." [1]

From the point when the soul forgets itself, contemplation becomes a delight and passive prayer a natural and inevitable practice. We add nothing here about the longing for suffering and self-immolation which God himself invariably inspires as prayer deepens, because the lives of all the Saints and mystics are full of this topic, and in a modest essay it is unnecessary to come into competition with giants of hagiography.

There is, however, one feature of mystical prayer which seems to demand some notice, because apparently entering so deeply into its nature as to look like an essential quality. Anyhow it is a test by which the genuine mysticism can be very easily discerned. We mean the spirit of calm and intellectual, but very distressful, abasement caused by divine contemplation. The expression of these moods of self-humiliation is commonly carried to such an extreme, as to appear to ordinary minds exaggerated or even morbid. How can the saintly man or woman escape condemnation at the bar of reason truth and mental sanity, who (having abandoned the world and all the attractions of self-love) derives from his or her prayer the con-

[1] 1 Thess. IV, 3.

viction of being a mass of depravity and spiritual failure?

This paradox of spirituality and the psychological atmosphere which it indicates, is no doubt one cause of the prejudice which even fair-minded persons display against Catholic mysticism, yet is really the inevitable outcome of advancement in knowledge of God. Nay, all our authorities declare that it is impossible to learn the truth about God's nature without at the same time sinking into a sort of abyss of psychic abasement, and even fear at the sight of one's absolute vileness in comparison with God. The soul must be emptied of self-love, it must suffer a real and very painful disillusion, it must learn to view itself solely in relation to God the Creator and Sanctifier—before it can mount on the wings of contemplation. She necessarily views not only self in relation to God but God in relation to self. Only when she has fathomed her own depths, can she gain a mystical knowledge of God's love and condescension, and then in due course of his wisdom his power and his loveliness. While striving to contemplate the face of God, she sees new reasons for acknowledging her intrinsic nothingness and the poorness of her service in comparison of her debt. Thus mysticism consists of a double reaction to God's movements—one of loving God and the other of hating self. The two reactions are so inter-related that each depends on the other,

with the result that the higher the flight in one direction, the lower the descent in the opposite.

Therefore what appears human folly is really the divinest wisdom. Our great authority for this view is St. Augustine, whose constant prayer, expressing the above double reaction, became reduced to the four words Cognoscam Me Cognoscam Te. Yet hardly will the critic of Christian contemplatives dare to accuse St. Augustine of exaggeration, or suspect his ascetic teaching of morbid tendency.

Before closing this chapter of description and reverting to theoretical problems, we may be allowed once more to insist on the fact that our only desire is to discuss what is highest and most essential in the character of Christian contemplation. At the cost of painful iteration we again urge the point, which is of certain truth, that all extraordinary favors imparted to mystics, or by their instrumentality to others, are accidental, and, moreover, of secondary importance. Our concern is with things which in their own way are wonderful enough, the infused prayer which contemplatives in their passivity experience, the Presence of God in Obscurity, the impulses and touches which this Presence imparts to the soul, the sense of Divine Union which culminates in a Spiritual Marriage, the light to the understanding, the warmth in the heart, even, we may add, such conviction of visions or voices as might in given cases spring from human psychology enlightened by Faith:—all these ex-

periences may be classed as ordinary phenomena. Fully supernatural and quasi-miraculous revelations and locutions, and all external manifestations of divine power belong to a different category. Great as is the condescension of God in granting such favors as we class as extraordinary (and we know that they are in some way the expression of his love for his creatures), yet we must always remember that these blessings, however communicated, are favors,—they are not Himself. In mystical contemplation it is nothing less than Himself which he communicates ineffably to the soul. That is what the true mystic feels; he has no doubt whatever about it, but we need not be surprised if he finds it impossible to give a clear account of his happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

Is Mystical Knowledge Vision?

There is undoubtedly some analogy between divine contemplation and the vision of God enjoyed by the Blessed in Heaven. Moreover, we should obtain a very poor idea of what mystical prayer is, unless we consider it in its relation to heavenly beatitude for which it is intended as a direct preparation. On the other hand, it is possible to understand the statements of mystics as to the knowledge they acquire of the Deity in an exaggerated way; and some writers on the subject have, as we think, clearly gone too far in suggesting, or sometimes even asserting, that the foretaste of Heaven which mystics enjoy is an actual participation of eternal bliss in all literalness.

The term Beatific Vision is sufficiently guaranteed by the words of Christ: "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God." [1] and thus theologians and believers generally are accustomed to apply the term "sight" or "vision" to acts of the intellect. We hope to "see" God, we take it

[1] St. Matthew, V, 8.

for granted that a real and true vision of God is the essence of our future beatitude, and that we shall enjoy this beatific happiness in proportion to our merit, that is to the use we make of the opportunities given us in this life to love and serve God supernaturally. The very essence of our supernatural life is that it is a state in which it is possible for us to acquire this merit or title for the sight of God. This blessedness is, therefore, something which we may increase as long as we are in a state of merit: but when we are once translated to our final condition it will be something absolutely stable. Though there may be other elements in our beatitude which will be capable of variation, the sight of God will be for each individual something incapable of change, either in the way of increase or decrease. This is the essential part of Beatitude, and what strictly speaking constitutes it.

The doctrine of the Beatific Vision by no means implies that we shall discern the Divine Nature and the Trinity of Divine Persons with our corporeal eyes. God is a spirit, and cannot be discerned except by a spiritual faculty.[1] But the term "seeing" is not necessarily restricted to material eyesight. There is such a thing as

[1] It is hardly necessary to add that even a spirit (if created), is unable to see God except through a supreme exercise of divine omnipotence. No created spirit has or could have connatural power of seeing God.

intellectual insight, and without any consciously metamorphical use of language we constantly apply the term "vision" to intellectual acts. We say for instance, "I do not see any honesty in so and so," or, "I do not see much advantage in such a line of conduct," or, "I see the truth of such a problem of Euclid,"—meaning by these expressions, "I have or have not a direct knowledge or intuition of these things."

Whenever, therefore, we acquire a *direct* knowledge of any object or truth, so that we gain an intimate cognizance of the thing as it is in itself, not through any sign or symbol or any line of argumentation or any result flowing from its nature—we are said to "see" or intue that thing. Thus we speak of "second sight," because this gift is thought to imply a direct and detailed knowledge of persons or events by way of sight, though not surely through the bodily eyes, since the things seen are distant and sometimes in the future. Psycho-physicists tell us also of abnormal powers of vision possessed by blind persons who "see" objects, obtaining a direct knowledge of them through some organ or sense of the body other than the eyes. Now, there is a special reason for our maintaining that these and similar uses of the word "see" or "vision" are not properly speaking metamorphical uses. At least, they are ordinary uses, readily understood, and never causing the slightest misapprehension of their meaning; which,

we repeat, is the direct knowledge of a thing, commonly indeed obtained through the eyesight, but sometimes obtainable through other faculties, whether of sense or of imagination or, finally, of intellect. And I would maintain that the term Beatific Vision, or the Vision of God which confers beatitude, is a term which explains itself and ought not to be classed in any true sense among metamorphical expressions. There is no ambiguity anyhow in the meaning of the word "Vision" as applied to the knowledge of God; we are all agreed as to the meaning of the word. But there is danger of ambiguity in applying the term to divine contemplation, and it is the object of the present chapter to guard against what we take to be mistaken views on this subject. The point we have to consider is, whether mystics "see God or not, in their prayer, or rather whether they can be said to "see" God in a sense which is anything but purely metaphorical. In other words, do they enjoy the Beatific Vision?

Now it is quite certain that if contemplative souls "see" God in the sense of attaining to any direct and intuitive knowledge of His existence and Essence, his Person and his attributes, then they already have what is substantial in beatitude. They may not have all the elements that are included in beatitude, but yet they are simply "beati," even in this life. There is no getting out of this evident truth, and some writers appear (we

think erroneously) to admit it is so.[1] Others will not go so far, but they express without sufficient caution their faith in some way that mystics do in this life attain to a sight of God.

Let me make it plain that I am not debating a mere phrase. As a matter of fact, the best mystical authorities, in describing their spiritual experience, use phrases which cannot be always understood literally. The very heart and kernel of the contemplation of mystics is their acquiring not merely a startling sense of the closest companionship with God as the lover of their souls, but also strong impressions of His extreme beauty and desirableness. If they exhaust all the resources of metaphor and sense-language in regard to their experience of God, they still feel as one that is dumb. Therefore, we must not wonder that they speak of "seeing" God in the sense that they apprehend him ineffably. But all this is not to the point. We are dealing not with rhapsody, but with cold analysis. And we ask:—*taking as true the statements of the mystics in the sense they intend them*—Is there justification for the assertion that mystical knowledge, in any of its phases, attains to some sort of direct intuition of the Divine Being?

Now, although Holy Scripture states that "we

[1] It will be understood that this attribution of essential beatitude only applies to the time during which the sight of God is supposed to be enjoyed.

cannot see God and live," some theologians (even including St. Thomas) have held that there may be exceptions to this general law. In any case, it is certain that the Sacred Humanity of Christ always enjoyed the Beatific Vision during his whole earthly life, from the first moment of his Incarnation. This condition, by which he combined the state of men "in viâ" with that of the Blessed "in patriâ," was a miracle of God's omnipotence, but the existence of this miracle shows at least that there is no inherent impossibility in such a combined existence. The question then arises: Was this privilege of Christ's Humanity ever communicated to a pure creature? For instance, was our Blessed Lady, either at the moment of the Resurrection, or at her First Communion, or at any other time during her mortal life, granted even a momentary vision of the Divinity of her Son? Or, was it her lot, like those of others, to have to wait for her beatification until the end, until the moment of her Assumption into Heaven? The same question has, of course, been asked about other great Saints in the moment of their ecstasy, —St. Paul, St. John at Patmos, or some of the other great mystics of the Catholic Church. Is it a fact that God has on certain rare occasions manifested his Divinity, at least in the way of a brief vision, to some of the Saints while they were still in this life?

Now this is a most interesting question, and we intend to return to it before concluding this chap-

ter; but it is not precisely the point which actually concerns us now. Supposing the question about Our Lady, St. Paul, and we may add Moses [1] were to be answered in the affirmative, it would by no means follow that Christian mystics in the ordinary course arrive at a stage of contemplation which may be described as direct vision. Yet this doctrine is apparently held with more or less definiteness by certain writers. We may quote here an admirable though simple work by the Rev. A. B. Sharpe,[2] who states very clearly the point we are impugning, in his chapter IV, which explains the object of mystical knowledge. He commences the chapter by the statement: "Mystical contemplation is the sight of God." Further on he says: "If we are to reject the mystics' account of their contemplative vision, on this ground [*viz.*, of the impossibility of any rational creature seeing God], we must equally reject the doctrine of the Church and the statements of Scripture as to the beatific vision . . . The difference between the *visio beatificans* and the mystical vision of persons still living on earth, is merely that the one is habitual and permanent, and the other transient and exceptional; and whereas the union of the blessed extends to the risen body by a kind of reaction, so

[1] With regard to the vision of Moses, the commentators have found some difficulty. In Exodus XXXIII the direct sight of God appears denied to the Patriarch, but in Numbers XII, 8 the statement occurs that "he saw the Lord."

[2] *Mysticism, Its True Nature and Value,* London, 1910.

that the body takes part in the vision with the soul with which it is substantially united, the divine vision for the 'viator' is restricted to the soul." [1] This passage has the merit of being perfectly clear. It is perhaps an extreme statement, but only because it is couched in the most explicit terms. A view at least approaching Fr. Sharpe's is, we think, not at all uncommon even among persons who have studied the question closely. Such people are sometimes convinced that true mystics may attain to a kind of communion with God which is in some way like to, or even identical with, the state of the Blessed.

And may we, before continuing our argument, say how heartily we should wish to subscribe to the view that there is some sort of true comparison between Mysticism and beatitude? The true contemplative does enter upon a new world, and that world is nothing else but God. In that world he breathes a new atmosphere, he moves in a new society, and he sees new sights (if we are to use human language). Why is St. Thomas called the Angelical, and St. Francis a Seraph, if it be not that even in their life-time they were in some sense raised to the level of the celestial company? The Beatific Vision is a form of divine contemplation, and when mystical contemplation reaches its noblest and purest form, it certainly does merit, in

[1] Fr. Sharpe believes that he is following the teaching of St. Thomas and of St. John of the Cross,—an idea which, we shall try to show, is due to misapprehension.

contrast with the ordinary joys of earth, the title "beatific."

Yet such a desire to exalt the nature of mystical prayer, or rather to find words to express its true worth, would not be a justification for making exaggerated dogmatic statements. If we consider the question fairly, we shall understand that to identify contemplative prayer with the direct vision of God is nothing less than cutting a Gordian knot. I mean that the whole problem we are considering is to find out the true nature of mystical contemplation, supposing that it is distinct from discursive or ratiocinative prayer on the one hand, and from Direct Vision on the other. Undoubtedly the theology of the Beatific Vision is very difficult, and even mysterious. But we need not (in the hypothesis we are criticising) add to the difficulty by pretending that there is an independent and additional difficulty about Mysticism. So soon as the latter is identified with anything else, it ceases to be a problem of a distinct kind. If contemplation, even in its highest phase, reaches to vision in the beatific sense, there is no particular reason for calling it "mystic." It should be simply called "beatific," and then we should know where we stand. It might, of course, be argued that there are many other and lower stages of prayer;—but even so, it appears to me that under such a hypothesis the lower stages could only be regarded as preliminary and accidental conditions for arriving at the Direct Vision of God, which

would be (and indeed is said by our opponents to be), contemplation proper. The whole theory, when stated baldly, as by the author we have quoted, is so extremely exotic and, moreover, so opposed to the trend of mystical Theology, that some of my readers may consider it unnecessary to argue further about it. But this is not altogether true, for it is only by exploring different avenues that we can reach our goal. No theory of divine contemplation can be said to be obvious; the subject really has great difficulties, and this particular theory of Direct Vision happens to be specially complicated. The method we are following is partly intended to be exhaustive,—not in the sense of exhausting the subject, *absit omen!*—but in the sense of rejecting theories which we believe to be false with a view to establishing one that is sound.

We must, therefore, discuss a few passages from the great authorities which might seem to tend towards a theory of Direct Vision, and see how they should be understood. St. Thomas twice in the same Article [1] uses the term "intuitus" in regard to contemplation. He says "as an angel intues (*intuetur*) the truth by a simple apprehension, man arrives by a certain process from many considerations at the intuition (*intuitum*) of simple Truth." And again, in almost identical terms: "Contemplation appertains to the actual (*ipsum*) simple intuition (*intuitum*) of Truth."

[1] I^{a} II^{ae}, quaest. CLXXX, art. 3, "*Conclusio*" and "ad I^{mum}."

Now such language, considered in itself, might certainly give strong color to the doctrine that divine contemplation is a kind of direct Vision of God;[1] but if we look closely at the context, we shall see that the interpretation is excluded. St. Thomas quotes Richard of St. Victor with approval: he is in fact following his guidance, and Richard's words are: "Meditation is the intuition (*intuitus*) of the mind occupied in the investigation of the Truth." So that if we are to take St. Thomas as implying by the use of the term *intuitus* of contemplation, that it involves the Direct Vision of God, he implies it also of *meditation when it is investigating the truth.* And this would, we venture to think, prove too much for anybody.

The whole theory arises, then, from taking phrases which are intended metaphorically, and interpreting them literally. Certainly contemplation is a sort of *intuitus* (intuition) of God, if only we take the term as a description, and not as a definition. Mystics do gaze upon God, they employ their time in this occupation, they do enjoy a sort of vision of God, they do feed their souls upon the sight of God;—but all this has nothing whatever to do with Beatific Vision, except that it is a preparation for the same. Words here may easily mislead.

[1] This was probably the doctrine of Plotinus, and it was just in this point that the Neoplatonist was corrected by Dionysius, who in all else follows him closely.

Besides, there is another equally decisive reason for not interpreting literally *intuitus* as applied to contemplation in general. We shall see directly that St. Thomas argues closely the case of the rapture of St. Paul. It is true that he somewhat doubtfully inclines to the affirmative view that St. Paul saw God directly in this life; but surely the close argumentation which he uses would be entirely superfluous if mystical knowledge as such (in its most perfect form) were identical with the Beatific Vision!

If we now turn for a moment to Fr. Suarez, we shall find that nothing could be clearer or stronger than his statement. He writes:[1] "In heaven beatitude will consist in perfect contemplation *i. e.*, by clear and open vision. In this life we cannot reach such contemplation, nor is our contemplation called Vision, in the sense of a clear intuition of the object contemplated as it is in itself . . . Inasmuch as in this life we cannot contemplate God immediately and in himself (*in se*), therefore we include in our contemplation in a secondary degree even his works that they may draw us to himself."

We remarked above that Fr. Sharpe appealed to St. John of the Cross as favoring this theory of direct Vision, whom he quotes[2] as describing the state of the actual union of the faculties with God,

[1] Tr. IV *De Oratione etc.*, Lib. II, Cap. IX, No. 6.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 96. He also quotes from St. Teresa, much to the same effect.

saying that this state must of necessity be transient, and that it rarely lasts for more than half an hour at the time. This prayer of union, which reaches its most complete form in what is termed the Spiritual Marriage of the Soul, is frequently accompanied by rapture; and it is quite true that the mystical writers exhaust their language in the effort to describe its intimate and transforming nature. St. Teresa said that when she was in this state she could not distinguish between God and herself; and St. John goes further and says that the Soul becomes divine by participation. St. Augustine had a similar experience, as he tells us in his *Confessions,*[1] when he says: "Thou didst so ravish me (*assumpsisti*) that I seemed to be *what I saw,* and no longer myself who saw."

But it by no means follows that St. John intends his description of this mystic state to be understood as a direct Vision of God. That the contrary is the case is made clear by the fact that, although he uses the phrase "actual union" as though it were a sort of vision (*i. e.,* in a metaphorical sense), he goes on in the same passage to speak of an *habitual vision,* which is to be considered "as a consequence of the actual union, being of the nature of an exalted faith in the permanent divine presence in the soul." This appears to us to be quite conclusive. For this Habitual Vision could not possibly be understood of the Beatific Vision, which no one ever imagined to be

[1] Book VII, chap. 10.

a habitual mystical state. Again St. John of the Cross, like all other writers on contemplation, speaks of the supernatural or divine light communicated to the soul, but it is perfectly gratuitous to assume that these expressions refer, as Fr. Sharpe refers [1] them, to the "Lumen Gloriæ."

What we have said will suffice for our main thesis regarding the theory that mystical knowledge is, strictly speaking, Vision. We will now revert to the question, already touched upon, as to certain special and exceptional cases, where theologians raise the question of a Direct Vision of God granted in this life. We repeat that this controversy really stands outside of our argument;—still it appears suitable that we should discuss it, as doing so may help to make our position clearer. It has been stated that in regard to St. Paul's Vision,[2] St. Thomas holds that the Apostle refers to a sight of the Beatific Vision, though with a certain reserve. It would be the extreme of hardihood for us to treat St. Thomas's view on such a question as erroneous, yet we may with all reverence set forth our reasons for inclining to the negative view.

In the first place St. Thomas, like St. Augustine whom he follows,[3] appears to think that St. Paul's own description of his experience cannot be rea-

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 98.
[2] 1 Cor. XII, 3. 4.
[3] IIa IIae quaest. CLXXV, art. III and VI.

sonably interpreted of an ecstasy. He says that he was "rapt into the third Heaven and heard things that are ineffable." Yet in Art. IV, ad 4^{tum}, St. Thomas himself remarks that both Isaias and St. John in the Apocalypse speak of visions of Heaven which were "imaginariæ;" and surely St. Paul, if suddenly transported by a similar divine vision, might easily express himself as he did. St. Thomas sees a special parallel with the case of Moses, who was the Doctor of the Jews as St. Paul was of the Gentiles. But here again the argument appears weak. The case of Moses has been more generally disputed than that of St. Paul, for in his case Scripture appears twice plainly to deny that he saw God's [1] essence, and even the possibility of this is denied to a living man. But waiving this difficulty (if we are to discuss such questions), was there any special propriety in St. Paul receiving a favor which was (presumably) denied to St. Peter and the rest? Certainly it appears fitting or necessary for his circumstances that he should receive divine communications, and especially that he should see the Sacred Humanity, which had been so familiarly known to all his colleagues. Such an actual occurrence is elsewhere described as though it were a vision of Christ, but not with any suggestion that Paul saw the Divine Nature. And could not the Apostle's own words be interpreted of a vision

[1] Ex. XXXIII, 20 and 23.

with locutions vouchsafed to him in the most sublime form of rapture, such as we read of in connection with the Saints of later ages?

Such an opinion was maintained by many of the great Fathers, such as Ambrose, Cyril, Gregory, and Leo,[1] and by eminent Thomist theologians, as Sylvius, one of the best known commentators on St. Thomas. With them agreed Molina and many Jesuits, including quite definitely Cornelius à Lapide.

The question of Our Lady is not so much discussed as that of St. Paul. Suarez holds that she had a gift of unintermittent contemplation, which was quite special to her, but may have been also communicated to St. John the Baptist[2] (may we not also add to St. Joseph?) and possibly to Jeremias. In virtue of this the Blessed Virgin would have been able to merit during the time of sleep, because this gift of prayer would not depend on the external organism. This, however, would be an infused gift, not involving a direct Vision of God. But in his Commentaries on St. Thomas,[3] while admitting that there is some probability in the view that Moses and St. Paul enjoyed the vision of God's essence, yet he adds it is "more probable" that this privilege was granted to the Mother of God in a more perfect and abundant manner,

[1] See Note to article in *Summa Theologica* (Paris, 1880), Vol. V, p. 496.

[2] *Tract. de Oratione* etc., Lib. II, Cap. XV, 5, and XIX. 5.

[3] On III[a], quaest. XXXVIII, disputat XIV, sect. IV, n. 2.

at least at the time of the Incarnation or the Resurrection.

This view of Suarez will undoubtedly be acceptable to many clients of Our Lady, because they like to think that every possible mark of God's favor was heaped upon her, and it is quite certain that Our Blessed Lord enjoyed the Beatific Vision at every moment of his mortal career. Yet it may still be doubted whether the privilege was extended to Mary before her Assumption into Heaven.[1] She was not only the Mother of God, she was also the Mother of Mankind. It was her special office to be a link between Heaven and earth, and it was one of her great privileges to be not merely a pure creature, but one specially assimilated in her life to her children. Now all Christians, whether saints or sinners, are led by the way of Faith, and not of Vision. Vision impedes Faith while it lasts, and also is not compatible with merit. "Because thou hast seen me Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed." [2] One reason why many strongly incline to marvellous exhibitions of God's power is that they have false or at least inadequate notions of His ordinary grace and of the capabilities of Mysticism while it is still confined to the ordinary track. Does not St. Teresa tell us that as contem-

[1] It need scarcely be pointed out that we should not think of denying the privilege to Mary if it must be accorded to other Saints.

[2] St. John XX, 29.

plative souls rise to the more sublime degrees of prayer, they fall away from ecstasies, visions, and other extraordinary phenomena? This is one reason why we incline to doubt that Our Lady's sanctity and privileges depended upon startling occurrences rather than upon her corresponding with God's grace and treading the straight path towards Heaven. Our Lord deliberately left her after Him for twelve years in a widowed condition, and we know His reason. It was not to confer ecstasy upon her,—that she would enjoy later,—but to make her of use for carrying out his designs for humanity. She may have had strange visions, and she may not.

We have already said that the confusion we referred to in this chapter is largely due to the difficulty the most experienced mystics find when they endeavor to describe their mental states. They necessarily fall back upon the language of sense. They tell us, for instance, that the Presence of God becomes so real to them that it is actually "felt." This is, of course, a metaphor, quite as much as any phrase about "seeing" God in prayer. Again, they commonly speak of God "touching" their spirit, and this expression gives a vivid idea of a real mystical fact. But it is also evidently a metaphor. Ultimately we must fall back upon the higher faculties. All Catholic writers agree that true mystical experience relates to what is called the apex of the soul, and that whenever the soul "feels" the "touch" of God, this experience is

the result of some action of God within the higher and spiritual part of the soul.

Therefore, if we want a solution of our query, "What is mystical prayer?"—we must look for it in some action of the intellect or the will, or both combined. It is necessary now that we should deal with an opinion which seems to us to be fallacious as laying undue stress upon the will.

CHAPTER VIII.

Can Mysticism be Explained by Volition?

We are going to consider in this Chapter another theory which we believe to be false, and which it is necessary to be clear about before we return to the more constructive side of our essay.

Divine contemplation implies that in some way the mystic's faculties derive illumination from his prayer, and we have to discover in what that illumination consists. We may assume at this point that the light which the intellect acquires differs widely from the direct vision of God, just as it does from any ordinary process of the reasoning faculty. For a mystical knowledge of God is certainly something supernatural, and yet we have seen reason to deny that it confers a power of directly apprehending the Divine Essence. We have, therefore to look for some external [1] principle which will confer new power upon the intellectual faculty in its search for God, and which will enable it to do its work more efficiently, without at the same time raising it to the level of those blessed intelligences who see God directly as He is in Himself.

[1] *i. e.*, external to the intellectual faculty barely considered.

As this problem appears to require a solution which is not easily apparent, some Catholic thinkers have had recourse to a theory which is not without plausibility, and which we are going to examine. They maintain that the simplest explanation of this difficulty concerning the intellect is that it is under the control of volition, and is strengthened in its act of contemplation by the action of the will. We have admitted that this view is not without some *prima facie* reasonableness, but we believe that it is quite inadequate to provide a satisfactory solution of our difficulty. Naturally the theory brings us at once into the field of philosophical speculation, which may not be a pleasing prospect for some of our readers, and for our own part we should be glad to avoid the subtleties of psychology, were it possible to do so. As it is, the most we can do is to try to make this question, intricate though it be, tolerably clear to those who will follow our argument.

This theory of the action of the will as explaining the illumination of the intellect has been propounded by my friend, Professor John Howley, of University College, Galway. Before offering any criticisms upon his publication, [1] it is just to add my tribute to the praise which the book has generally received. It is somewhat controversial,—or shall we say, apologetic?—in its aims, but is remarkable for a sympathetic spirit and the endeavor to present views to which the author is opposed in

[1] *Psychology and Mystical Experience*, London, 1920.

the fairest light, and must take its rank as a substantial contribution to the psychology of Mysticism.[1] When, however, Professor Howley attempts to construct a theory of Catholic Mysticism, he is hampered by the limitations of his method. As a layman he can hardly be a theologian in the professional sense, and we have already put in a strong plea against the too wide-spread tendency to divorce mystical from dogmatic theology. On one point the Professor is extremely clear, and that is the negative nature of the idea of God which can be obtained by our natural faculties.[2] And he holds rightly that this negative idea of God is the substratum of mystical prayer. "It is in contemplation *per viam negationis,*" he says, "where the idea of God is found negatively, that we may find the true mystical type, if we can succeed in excluding what may be termed philosophical contemplation or speculation";[3] and further: "God is the Absolute, or He is not; and we can

[1] His chapters on "Conversion" form perhaps the most interesting and important section of the work. He has to some extent gone over the ground covered by Prof. James in the *Varieties of Religious Experience,* and throws considerable light upon some of the questions raised by that stimulating work.

[2] In dealing with this subject (in Chapter II) we protested against the view that our natural idea of God is wholly negative. If Professor Howley errs, it is perhaps on the side of over-emphasising this negative idea; but we admit that it was absolutely necessary for his argument to stress the point strongly.

[3] *Op. cit.,* p. 225.

only express His name in consciousness by a denial of the very ultimate of consciousness, the final elaboration of the idea of Being (that is, of all Being known to us by experience). The very word Absolute is negative and postulates the denial of the Relative. If we wish to discourse about it, we must express ourselves by negative propositions." And it is in this that he sees a "psychic paradox of mystical experience"—namely, that a negative idea should have a positive reaction upon the will without recourse to the lower experience by which it was derived by negation.[1]

Having thus stated the problem—in terms to which no reasonable objection can be taken—Professor Howley proceeds to propound his solution, which, as we have said, throws the whole weight upon the volitional action.[2] He says: "The idea of God, so abstract and above our power to grasp with a sense of reality (*i. e.,* in non-mystical prayer), must needs remain a feeble element in consciousness. But the idea of God comes into mystical experience very differently. It is no longer a feebly dynamic element coming into a crowd. It comes to its own place in the apex of the mind and with its own immense dynamism. The will reacts, not feebly and perfunctorily, as

[1] *Op. cit.,* p. 236.

[2] It might be objected here that this theory does not recognise the supernatural effort of divine grace;—but we take it that the Professor is merely abstracting from this while discussing Mysticism on its psychological side.

to a shadow, but with a quite extraordinary vigor of love." [1]

We must not continue our extracts, but the theory is developed at considerable length and with much analytical power. The mystic is said to be hardly conscious of what is still called the negative idea, until he feels this reaction of the will, in consequence of which it perceives its presence, and its cognitive powers are thereby strengthened. The description of the psychic process is given in language which is not always easy to follow, but contains some vivid passages and gives evidence of spiritual as well as scientific insight.

Now in finding fault with Professor Howley's treatment of this difficult subject, we should like it to be quite clear that our objection is not on the ground that he insists so strongly upon the influence of the will upon the intellect. It is the kind of influence which we believe his theory wrongly postulates. If we would maintain the freedom of the will, we must admit that it has (except in regard to self-evident propositions) enormous power in moulding our convictions and indirectly our character. That this power should be stressed most strongly in any theory of Mysticism is, therefore, no ground of complaint. We may compare psychic facts of a different but cognate order. In the field of ordinary education we constantly find that the smart but less attentive learner is beaten by the determined plodder, the

[1] *Op. cit.*, 252–3.

reason being that the will can by its power fix the attention of the mind on its object. And in matters of religious faith we see again an illustration of this law. Lightminded persons or those whose will is fickle and weak, even though otherwise intellectual, are in danger of losing their faith from a lack of attention to the motives of assent, while another may cling to them doggedly, but with perhaps less understanding.

The same principle may be justly applied to the psychology of contemplation. In fact, theologians make it clear to us that in this the will is involved quite as deeply as the intellect. Nothing could be clearer than the statement of Suarez on this subject. He writes [1] following, as he says, St. Thomas, Dionysius, St. Bonaventure, and Gerson: "Christian contemplation differs from that which is common and philosophical in that it is not merely speculative, but should be practical, both as regards the truth contemplated and the intention of the person contemplating. For although it is concerned with God and considers His majesty, goodness, and other attributes, it does not rest in God as something intelligible only, but considers how He is worthy of honor and glory; and it would not otherwise merit the name of contemplation which is a form of mental prayer and pertains to such an exercise. The end of contemplation ought to be union with God, and, therefore, it needs must contemplate God not merely specu-

[1] *Tract. De Oratione etc.*, Lib. II, quaest. IX, no. 8.

latively (*speculativè*) but in so far as this is possible also practically (*practicè*). Therefore it should be practical in the intention of the person contemplating, that is directed (*ordinata*) to true sanctity." The Doctor then goes on to draw the conclusion that contemplation, though mainly an act of the intellect, is accompanied by acts of the will, and (again quoting from St. Thomas) declares that these are acts of pure charity to be compared to those that are elicited by the Blessed in Heaven.[1]

Thus we have no disposition to deny that the will plays a large and important part in divine contemplation, and what is more to the purpose, that such action of the will must have a reflex influence over the intelligence. We know how this happens in ordinary ratiocination, how the intellect can be guided, stimulated, or restrained in its activities by volition. All educational systems take into account the principle of sympathy, suasion, predilection; and experience teaches us at every turn that, as in other fields of endeavor, so in acquiring and consolidating knowledge, "where there is a will there is a way." It is through the will that the intelligence braces itself to its task, through the will that it perseveres in

[1] He adds that contemplation is a certain "participation and imitation of the Beatific Vision"; (but not of course in the sense we rejected in our last chapter, as is clear from passages quoted above).

face of difficulty, through the will that it exults in victory and resolves to go forward to new conquests of the mind over matter. Nowhere is this truth recognised more fully than in the spiritual combat, where, as St. Paul says, "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world in this darkness, against the spirit of wickedness in high places." [1]

And if no contest is more severe, no darkness deeper than that in which the mystic is engaged in his spiritual career, we can have no doubt that all the will power which he can command will be constantly called into action. Here, if anywhere, "the battle is not unto the strong" of intellect. It is indeed a fact well worth remarking that many of the great mystics have been men of extraordinary gifts of intellect and temperament,—Augustine, Aquinas, Dante,—but none knew better than they that mere intellect avails little in this matter, and indeed some of the contemplative giants were persons of small accomplishments, who would have been little esteemed by the world had not God marked them out for great things.

But granting all this to the fullest, is it not a very different matter to pretend that divine contemplation, as a special kind of cognition of God, can be explained in terms of the will? When it comes to root-psychology, the will is in itself a blind

[1] Ephes. VI, 12.

faculty; for all its guiding and restraining power, it must ever depend for its immediate action upon the intellect.

We feel here what a difficult subject we are entering upon, how these philosophical distinctions may be objectionable to the ordinary thinker; but we hope that our readers will allow us to state the conditions of the problem, and perhaps they may even realize that our proposition is worth while. What we would say is this. There are cases where the power to choose, or even to deliberate, is withdrawn from the will simply because it is flooded with light from the intellect. Now such cases do not come directly, it is true, into our argument, but their very possibility should be a reminder of the limitations of the will outside of its proper sphere. There is no principle more deeply ingrained in scholastic psychology than that expressed by the adage, "Nihil amatum nisi prius cognitum," *i. e.*, nothing can be loved (or desired) by the will unless (and in so far as) it is previously known by the intellect. What is the act of deliberation, which alone can cause an act of the will to be meritorious or the reverse, but a process of the intellect? How can the mind tend to what it has not previously recognised as desirable? This principle is certainly known to Professor Howley, for he has quoted it; but if he had taken it for his guide, he would not have written as he has.

Let us anyhow be clear in our minds that, al-

though the intellect may be restrained or stimulated by the will, it has to do its own work. The will cannot give light to the intellect. It can fix the attention of the mind upon its evidence or motives for accepting or rejecting evidence; it cannot propose new motives or put them in a stronger light than that in which they appear.

Now what is our problem? It is to discover what divine contemplation is, and how it is grounded on its psychological side. In other words, how is the mind enabled to acquire a true, intellectual, though not (as we have tried to prove) direct, knowledge of God which is *toto cælo* different from, and higher than, what merely natural or philosophical reasoning can attain to?

To call upon will power as a most important adjunct in this process, which we may call x, is entirely right; to lose sight of the call which any such mystical process must make upon will power would be a fatal and almost an absurd error, and one which we should not like to be thought guilty of.

But to those who turn round and say the will is going [1] to do this work, the action of the will is going to solve the difficulty, we reply, *"non tali auxilio."* Even if it were merely a question of extending or deepening our knowledge in any depart-

[1] Again we must remind our reader that if we do not refer to the action of divine grace in our argument, it is merely because we find it necessary for the moment to prescind from such action. We are not considering the Efficient but the Formal cause of mystical mentality.

ment, without that of mounting to a completely new sort of mentality, we should still protest against the doctrine that such improvement could be effected by will power, though it would undoubtedly be promoted. But mystical or divine contemplation, if such a thing exists, must imply a psychological movement too remote from ordinary mental processes to be styled a mere extension of natural knowledge. Even in our chapter upon Natural Contemplation we gave reasons for presuming that some kind of strange process is therein implied, which appears to demand a special aid from God,—though not necessarily in that supernatural order which we now have under consideration.

In order to press this point, we will consider the analogy of beatific contemplation. This belongs to a higher order than the prayer of the earthly mystic, yet will serve very well for illustrating our point. We are not going to debate the question hotly disputed by theologians, how far the movements of the will, such as acts of love and adoration, enter strictly into the *essence* of Beatitude. St. Thomas and all his School maintain the negative view; they think that the direct Vision of God (which is an intellectual act) properly constitutes essential bliss,—while the acts of the will, though necessarily accompanying the vision and springing from it, are to be considered as holding a secondary place. The question is not of vital importance, being, as it were, temperamental and expres-

sional rather than involving any important dogmatic principle. But our point is this. The nature of the Beatific Vision itself as a state of the intellect, is fraught with psychological difficulty and has exercised the mind of theologians considerably and continues to do so. Now suppose a theory was started which should endeavour to solve this problem by explaining that the Vision can be explained in terms of the will and of its reflex effects upon the intellect! Such a doctrine is, of course, unthinkable, and we doubt if any theologian ever attempted to propound it. Note the parallel. The part played by the will can be questioned—the part played by the intellect cannot, because our problem fundamentally relates to that faculty.

There are, moreover, special reasons from the dogmatic standpoint why we should guard against any obscuration of the scholastic doctrine about our faculties. The freedom of the will is at the present day the main point of the attacks of materialism upon Catholic truth. I must admit that the theory I am impugning does not directly imperil this doctrine, for it seems rather to exaggerate the power of the will, and thus possibly even to emphasize its freedom. But the whole system of Catholic psychology is so knit together in its several parts that any statement which throws any one of them out of balance, is very likely to undermine the whole philosophical structure.

Again if we turn to theology proper we shall

find that the doctrine of the Trinity, as gradually developed by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, is grounded in great measure upon our knowledge of the working of the human faculties; and very especially upon the distinction between cognition and volition and upon the priority of the former over the latter. So that here again we have a strong, if extrinsic, reason against the overstraining of these principles for any reason whatsoever.

But to return to our more immediate subject, we find sufficient reason for rejecting the theory that the action of the will solves the problem of divine contemplation, in the fact that the theory does not light up the Dark places but rather brings into them fresh confusion. As an illustration of this result, I append the following passage in which Howley sums up his position: "Mystical experience is the reaction of the impress of the negative idea of God on the purified will. Its tone is essentially affective, but with a cognitive feature apprehended in and by the affections." (We do not think this is very clear, but still it may express a tolerable meaning. But what of the following sentence?) "There is a fusion of cognition and affection in one act; their union is as it were substantial. It is a loving knowledge or rather a love that knows. The *verbum mentis,* the expressed word of the mind in mystical experience, is not the formation of the intellect, but the utterance of

the whole inner mind, intelligence, and will in one." [1]

If the above is to be taken as an exact philosophical statement of what happens in divine contemplation (and it can have no other value), we could hardly characterize it without stronger words than we care to use. The science of psychology cannot proceed except by carefully analysing our mental processes, and by keeping our analysis intact. Any psychological theory which involves a complete fusion, or rather confusion, of faculties, seems to me to stand *ipso facto* self-condemned. Why do we invent expressions like *verbum mentis* for concepts of the intellect, if we are to allow ourselves to speak of this *verbum* as the "utterance of the intelligence and will in one?"

Let us stand by the principle that, whatever influence the will may exercise over our thinking, that influence does not involve the power of intrinsically affecting the intellect or of modifying its native powers. When the intelligence gains illumination, it does not do so by the action of any extrinsic faculty of the soul, but either by its own inherent virtue, aided by its natural object (when it acts naturally), or by some virtue directly infused into it (when it acts supernaturally). Just as God alone can move the will of the mystic to elicit supernatural acts, so God alone can illuminate his intelligence with a sort of knowledge which

[1] *Op. cit.*, 243.

is higher than our natural apprehension of God, but yet inferior to the direct vision granted only to the Blessed. How this can come about we have yet to determine;—all we claim to have shown is that it is useless to look for such illumination in volitional acts.

CHAPTER IX.

Mysticism and Sanctity.

We seem to have assumed in the foregoing pages that the practice of mystical prayer is most intimately bound up with sanctity of heart in the deepest sense. This proposition is of such vital importance for our argument regarding the essential nature of mystical contemplation that we must devote this chapter to its consideration. At first sight the matter may appear to be obvious, a mere truism, but in reality there are some difficulties to be considered.

In the first place, the greatest mystics have been Saints, and the Saints have been very commonly mystics. It is true indeed that many Saints, like St. John Berchmans, have been distinguished not for exceptional gifts of prayer or piety, but for the perfection with which they performed the duties of ordinary life, whether in religion or the world. That this type of everyday sanctity (if we may so term it) is somewhat rare is stressed by the way in which St. John Berchmans is referred to as the Saint of Common Life, as though it conferred upon him an unusual sort of distinction. On the other hand, the view we have presented of mystical

prayer, the accepted view of mystical theology, does not postulate any extraordinary gifts, but asserts that Mysticism consists in a specialized mode of communing with God and of cultivating an intimate knowledge and love of his being and attributes.

According to such a view there appears to be scarcely room for doubt that in its essence mystical prayer not merely confers, but almost constitutes, sanctity, which can be nothing more or less than some assimilation to God by knowledge, love, and service. This is clearly stated in the Catechism to be the end for which man was created.

Yet, as we have said, there are grounds for hesitation before we in any way identify Mysticism with sanctity. Such a doctrine seems to elevate unduly the contemplative at the expense of the active life. Also, it seems to lose sight of the human element in Mysticism, which, however much it may be minimised, yet cannot be got rid of. Mystics frequently have a special sort of temperament. Is it not true that St. Teresa, perhaps the most influential, perhaps the greatest of all Christian mystics, was inclined to neurosis? Her biographer fully recognises that in her early years she was subject to seizures of a mildly epileptic character. Therefore, there could possibly have been in her spiritual experience the same sort of pathological element which is a recognised feature of many forms of spurious Mysticism, ancient and modern, and which certainly need not involve high

sanctity. And although it is not meant to imply that all Christian mystics have neurotic tendencies, yet it appears possible that they may often possess temperamental dispositions, and indeed such are noticed in their characters and history. If this be admitted as a normal though varying substratum of mystical prayer and states, the point could be urged as seeming to discount any theory about them which is akin to our thesis. Another point, perhaps less important, but worth mention is that, though many men of high eminence have practised mystical prayer, yet the great majority of contemplatives, at least at the present day, are women. Without any disrespect, does not this fact suggest a caution against some overbalance in the theory of mystical sanctity?

Let us first, then, take this question of temperament and of sex. In order to deal with it, we must iterate the distinction between what is essential and what is accidental in Mysticism. We cannot, in the concrete, get away from what is accidental, and it must be admitted that, if we regard the history of mystics, temperament does play in it a somewhat prominent part. The whole difficulty in a theoretical, or even in a practical, treatment comes from this, that the human and divine elements are inexplicably intermingled in mystical phenomena, and that in our view of them we cannot often certainly decide what is of the divine and what of the human spirit. It is true that one of the greatest contributions ever made to the

subject was given by Ignatius Loyola in those "Rules for the Discretion [1] of Spirits" which we ventured to quote in our last chapter. But rules are one thing, the application of them is another. The existence of the rules points to the existence of a difficulty.

If, then, we grant that even in the greatest mystics there is a natural or temperamental side, and one which can hardly ever be dissociated (as far as our knowledge goes) from the divine, which is certainly the essential thing in the phenomena,—the difficulty about identifying sanctity with the essence of Mysticism will disappear. If it should be asked bluntly, "Does sanctity then depend even indirectly upon temperament?"—we must answer, "Yes, it does," or rather, "Yes, *in some circumstances* it may." Because we do not in the least assert that Mysticism, at least if understood in its more technical sense, is the only form that sanctity can take, but rather that, when it does occur, (provided it be and insofar as it be genuine), it is equivalent to substantial sanctity and may be practically regarded as identical with it. The spirit of God bloweth where it listeth, and if God has chosen women, and sometimes imaginative or impressionable men, as a theatre in which he will display the wondrous workings of his grace, we see no reason to object. St. Paul distinctly asserts: [2] "God has chosen the foolish things of the

[1] The Latin is "*discretio*," which means "distinction."
[2] 1 Cor. I, 28.

world that he may confound the wise . . . and things that are not that he might bring to nought the things that are."

I should like here to quote an interesting passage from Professor James on the question of what he calls the neurotic or psychopathic temperament. He also was up against the objection that much of the religious experience which he has collected in the volume we have already referred to, clearly belonged to persons who were peculiarly emotional, especially because his method of enquiry led him to look for extremes of religiosity. But he grasps the nettle rather vigorously by saying:[1] "As regards the psychopathic origin of so many religious phenomena, that would not be in the least surprising or disconcerting, *even were such phenomena certified from on high to be the most precious of human experiences.* No one organism can possibly yield to its owner the whole body of truth. Few of us are not in some way infirm, or even diseased; and our very infirmities help us unexpectedly. In the psychopathic temperament we have the emotionability which is the *sine qua non* of moral perfection; we have the intensity and tendency to emphasis which are the essence of practical moral vigor; and we have the love of metaphysics and mysticism which carry one's interests beyond the surface of the sensible world. What then is more natural than that this temperament should introduce one to regions of religious

[1] *Loc. cit.*, p. 25 (italics ours).

truth, to corners of the universe, which your robust Philistine type of nervous system, forever offering its biceps to be felt, thumping its breast, and thanking heaven that it hasn't a single morbid fibre in its composition, would be sure to hide forever from its self-satisfied possessors. *If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity.*"

Now, we hope it is unnecessary to say that our standpoint is *toto cœlo* different from that of this famous rationalist. We quote him because we think his testimony is useful, even though he goes farther than we require. He seems to maintain that temperament may be positively an element in sanctity; we merely assert that it need not be a disqualification. There is another point. Professor James knows very little about Monasticism, nothing certainly from within, and there is very little really in common between the experiences he collected mainly from the freaks of Protestantism and those of an average collection of Catholic contemplatives.

Our contention is that in discussing the essence of Mysticism we are entitled to prescind from those variable human elements which may be more or less common among certain classes of contemplatives even in the Catholic Church, but which are purely accidental and, therefore, cannot seriously prejudice our argument. It is for this reason

that we have so much insisted that all those mystical states, such as ecstasies and raptures, visions, locutions, and all extraordinary phenomena, are of far less importance and value than mystical prayer, which is a much simpler thing than they are. For although we could not deny that in all Mysticism there is the human side, which we have summed up in the term "temperament," and that therefore the influence of psychological conditions is not confined to the extraordinary accompaniments of Mysticism,—yet it is in the latter department that we shall always find the most evident traces of temperament, whether it be verging towards neurosis or not. This is quite natural. To take the case of visions. They are not always classed by experts as "imaginary," yet there is a strong pictorial element frequently observable in the celebrated visions of the greatest Saints. Take, for instance, those of St. Gertrude, who saw God under the aspect of an orb of fire, and her own soul as a second smaller orb. The visions of St. Bridget, like those of Ann Catherine Emmerick, give very detailed pictures of the Life of our Lord. St. Margaret Mary generally saw Our Lord's Humanity as though with her mortal eyes, and some have thought that the so-called Apparitions were real and actual visitations, but there is no proof of this. Even in cases like these, where it would be temerarious to suppose that there was no supernatural occurrence, yet most theologians would admit that in the most authentic visions we may

allow for an admixture of individual mentality. This is, in fact, to apply the philosophical rule, "Whatever is received is received according to the manner of the recipient."

When, however, we turn to the experiences of more ordinary mystics in private life, even those remarkable for their close union with God, the case is stronger than when we are dealing with great historic visions of the canonized. When in their prayers mystics receive impressions regarding holy things, these may, of course, be due to a supernatural cause; but yet there is nothing to prove certainly that they are so entirely. Knowing what we now do of automatism and subconscious workings of the human spirit, no sane director would lightly assume such impressions to be divine, at least in the sense that they are due to God's grace working outside of the ordinary channel. And what is more, any contemplative that was over-inclined to refer this or her impressions to God alone, would be for this very fact suspect.[1]

It has always been considered a safe working rule to encourage doubt in the mind of a contemplative, where doubt is possible, as to the extraordinary interpositions of God. Where He intends to reveal himself (though perhaps not until after a period

[1] We do not refer to cases where this impression of divine action is so strong as to constrain the mystic's belief in a supernatural cause. The fact that such constraint has been known to exist, especially in the case of important revelations, would seem to afford an additional motive for withholding assent in cases where such constraint is not clear.

of suspense), he will somehow make his will plain to all concerned. In the case of great revelations, like those regarding devotion to his Sacred Heart, opposition was raised with the result that the stronger it became, the more was elicited the truth which finally triumphed. If this was so in such a great cause, how much more is opposition permissible in the case of lesser favors! It must, however, be granted that such opposition has at times been carried too far by the incredulous, who have learned at their own cost to moderate their zeal for moderation.

We hope that now we have made our meaning clear when we assert that no valid argument can be brought against the essential sanctity of contemplation from the existence of human eccentricity. Such features as may seem at times to distort the divine picture, especially if they concern accidental states or manifestations, do not really come into our purview. We are maintaining now one thing only; it is this: Contemplation is holy in so far as it is an effort to reach God directly (combined always with God's own effort to react upon the mystic). This cannot be really subject to delusion;—where it seems to be so it ceases to be the true mysticism, and so lies outside of our count.

But there is yet to be considered another, perhaps a more plausible, objection to identifying Mysticism and sanctity. Are we not to suppose that saintliness consists in something more substantial than what is after all an interior act? By

a Saint we mean a man of God in the completest sense, one who strives and suffers or perhaps dies for the love of God and of humanity. After all human life is a complex thing,—as the poet says, "something real, something earnest";—surely to please our Maker in the fullest possible way, it should be necessary to carry out His will in all the relations of life—not in one, however important it may loom in the eyes of some, perhaps too enthusiastic people? In order to maintain that contemplation is a good and holy occupation, is it needful to strain our judgment and, as it were, to make it the only thing?

We are touching now an old and difficult controversy. It goes back to the days of Plato at least, for all we know much further. The Greek philosophers were hard set to maintain that θεωρία was the end of Man, the *Summum Bonum*. Maintain it they did, but we are not able to view the great problems of life at least solely from their standpoint. Among Christian thinkers, it must be admitted, there has been much variety of opinion as to the claims of action and of contemplation to be counted the highest ideal of human existence.

We do not wish to plunge into this controversy as a mere matter of speculation, but we cannot avoid making some suggestions upon the subject if we are to maintain the proposition that true Mysticism is true sanctity; and those who will do me the honor to read my essay will comprehend the importance which I attribute to that proposition.

After all, the proposition, whatever may be the difficulty attaching to it, is not (we think) one that would outrage the collective conscience of Christians. Is there not among men an instinctive feeling that divine contemplation in whatever degree it may be reached does imply a corresponding degree of holiness,—or in other words that whatever be deficient in a mystic should be traced to the lack of reality in his prayer?

On the other hand, there is a strong prejudice, not merely outside the Church, but even, though to a less extent, among Catholics, against any attempt to elevate contemplation at the expense of what is called the active life. Objectors often go so far as to say that they find something selfish and almost cowardly in retiring from the converse of mankind to devote one's whole time and attention to silence and prayer. From such a point of view even the claims of justice are invoked against the professional recluse, who seems to neglect family, friends, and country to indulge a passion for spiritual enjoyment. Theologians admit that cases may occur when a member of a contemplative Order, to which he is bound by the most solemn vow, is strictly obliged to return to the world for the performance of duties to parents or possibly to children. We are, however, looking for a wider law than can be covered by a few exceptional cases of emergency.

We should like to maintain a view of the whole question which seems to be obscured by those who

argue the case as though contemplation and activity are necessarily opposed. If the argument is to proceed on the lines that either contemplation or the active life is to be preferred to the other, the case is very difficult to argue. On the one hand, it is a matter of faith that our eternal destiny, if we save our souls, will mainly consist in the vision of God, and therefore to occupy ourselves here below in a lower but still a real knowledge of God, appears to be a reasonable method of preparing for eternity. Many good Catholic authorities fall back on the view that the best sort of life is one that aims at combining contemplation with external activity, and this is the practice of many of the Religious Orders, particularly those of more recent foundation. This is the view of Suarez, and it is one against which we have not the slightest objection. But we want to go, as it were, behind it; we would ask a previous question—our view is not that the purely contemplative life is always superior to what is called mixed, but that to put these two things into competition involves a wrong assumption, namely, that in the Catholic Church the so-called contemplative Orders are devoid of activity in the truest and deepest sense. It gives an entirely inadequate or contorted view of the case to suppose that Carthusian Monks and Carmelite Nuns rid themselves of the world any more than Jesuits or Sisters of Charity. Both kinds of religions try to rid themselves of the evil in the world, neither have they

any use for its riches and pomps. Both kinds of religions believe that eternity is worth living for; they also believe that spiritual activity is more profound in its effects than intellectual, just as the intellect is more powerful than matter. They want life and action, power and efficiency; they believe that worldly people are really dead or dying. Now a difference of method may not imply different ends. A Sister of Charity slaves in a fetid hospital, not mainly for the healing of bodies, but for the saving of souls. A Carmelite strives equally hard, and at least as efficiently. But there is another point. Those who are overwhelmed with external activity may become great contemplatives. But it is difficult; and it is especially in their mystical life that they are helped and strengthened by the knowledge of those who are devoted to Mysticism pure and simple. We must consider their case, because if the theory of Mysticism breaks down here, it is of slight avail to try and bolster it up by appealing to those who combine it with external activity. If pure contemplation is equivalent to holiness, then, as a chief element in the mixed life, we see how great must be its potency; but we ought to be able to view it at its best when it is not adulterated (so to speak) with alien occupations.

The fact is that mystics live in a world of their own,—and that not an imaginary one. They are quite alive, and life consists always in some sort of action. What is true for others is true for them.

Even in the world we see that there is no real joy in life except for those who are absorbed in some kind of work, whether it be in the way of intellect or of more material interests. A man or a woman must have some object outside of themselves to live for, be it nothing more ennobling than finance, politics, cricket or big game. Women find their happiness more often in home life, but they, too, are coming to take a more responsible part in public affairs, and they may be in some cases the happier for it. Thus for persons who do not understand Mysticism, one entering a convent is an object of intense pity, or scorn. How grey will be their existence within the narrow walls! What sameness, no joy, no society at least of their own choice! Neither books, nor pictures, nor travel, nor the joy of battle! They will be tutored into a sort of passive immobility, they will get in a way accustomed to their lot, but it can hardly be called a decently human existence.

Tell all this to a contemplative nun with a strong vocation, and she will not understand. "But," she will reply, "I *am* alive, my life is very real, very full, very interesting. My struggle is a *real* struggle. I am neither a visionary, nor a fool, nor a pitiful aimless thing. Every word you say against me, I not merely laugh at it, but I retort, *You* of the outside world seem to me to be aimless, to be living for imaginary goods, to be engaged in a perpetual, senseless, strife all about nothing."

It is no use to argue about Mysticism, unless we

can get people to understand that it means to enter into a new world, one that is full of interest and of endeavor and high delight. The joy of it is not always felt in equal degree, and as soon as you seek its joy as an end, you lose the whole thing. But the joy is there; it is within one's inmost being; it cannot be taken away; it is a joy so real and so palpable that nothing else can compete with it for a moment. And it is the joy of battle. It has nothing to do with sitting down and moping or dreaming or building castles in the air. The monk in his cell, the nun in her convent, is wrestling for God by day and often by night. The evil in the world is ever before their eyes. Many an enclosed woman is offering herself as a victim of expiation for the sin of which she practically knows nothing. But expiation is a part, not the whole of her life. There is adoration, intercession, the prayer of gratitude, the prayer of curiosity to know God better, the ardent effort to be more fitted to be united to God as a spouse, sometimes a sort of mystical absorption in the thought of God, which cannot be really expressed by words, but is described as Spiritual Marriage. It is not our object to classify and define all the various states of mystical prayer, but merely to show that it is something extremely real, perfectly delightful, and above all that it is dynamic or full of psychologic movement. It is the activity of mystic love which ensures its Apostolic character. Prayer gives warmth as well as light to the soul; and all

that human love which is so beautiful in domestic life is awakened with tenfold power in the breast of the mystic.

So far are spiritual persons from being the cold, bloodless wraiths which their critics love to depict, that they are in a furnace of anxiety and ardent zeal about those whom they have left to fight unequal battles with the world. Absorbed as they are in the love of God, saving souls has become to them a veritable passion. Jesus Christ is their only model; their inner life consists in carrying on his work, and making his Redemption fruitful. They live beneath the shadow of his altar, and it would be anguish indeed not to be taking the place of those who live as though Christ was not in his tabernacles. If they are oppressed, it is with the weight of their responsibility, not with any feeling of emptiness in their daily life. We are very far from maintaining that the mystical life is confined to persons secluded from the world. We have drawn attention to the remarkable spread of Mysticism among Catholics in general and even outside the Catholic Church. But if Mysticism spells saintliness, you cannot have it in too concentrated a form; and clearly it is antecedently probable, and we know from experience, that prayer will flourish better among communities, supposing that they are what they pretend to be, than among people who suffer from the distractions of ordinary life.

Our subject is Mysticism as such, and we make

bold to say that a true and fervent contemplative *as such* is the greatest asset to mankind and especially to his or her nation or kindred.

And how are we going to prove this point? First, let us consider it by analogy. It is quite recognised among men of ordinary intelligence that persons devoted to intellectual pursuits benefit the community they belong to quite independently of such external results as may accrue to their scientific or literary research. It is becoming more and more common to regard the multiplication of universities all over the civilized world, not merely as a means to provide a better supply of teaching institutions, but as a necessary factor in human evolution. They are, of course, supported by public funds, under the idea that they make for national betterment; but also they are regarded now with favor as the homes of abstract learning. Thus the mere exercise of intellect is promoted; intellect is honored in itself; civilized man feels that he has some share in all that intellect achieves.

Now let us turn to the Gospel. Christ said:[1] "The Kingdom of heaven is like to a leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened." The existence of contemplative communities in the Church is necessary if the Church is to carry on her function. They are, as it were, the power-houses, from which electric currents of saintliness are radiated to the outside world. These currents are a spirit of un-

[1] St. Matt. XIII, 33.

earthly detachment from perishable goods and honors, charity, purity, self-denial, orderliness of life, and prayer. These things are required outside the monastery and (provided the monastery is up to the mark), it keeps up an unfailing supply of spiritual electricity to travel far and wide.

Christ himself taught this lesson by his own example. He worked very hard during his short missionary career, but the greater part of his life consisted in giving an object-lesson to mankind, holding up new standards of life, radiating currents of spiritual force. If he worked during the day, he retired to the mountain to pray at night. He never gave us any reason for imagining that prayer is less needful, less forceful, than external work. The Church which he founded is a perfect society; it is also an army. Now an army consisting of citizen soldiers or volunteers is all very well; but to be thoroughly efficient, it requires regulars (as we call them, too) that is, troops regularly trained to their special duties. Not all are to fight; some are to organize, some are to command, some to provide food and ammunition, some to do hospital work. In a spiritual army we naturally add, some to pray, to give example, to maintain the highest standard of life, to provide a special link between earth and Heaven.

It has been recognised that in the old time the life of contemplatives was of great benefit to the Church and to society both in the spiritual and

the material order (which latter we are not now attending to). When life in the world was in turmoil and manners half-barbarous, the example of homes consecrated to prayer and piety exercised a strange power over people's imagination. But surely at no period of human history were the lessons of renunciation more needed than to-day, when the mad pursuit of pleasure threatens to disintegrate family and national life. And if we hold that Catholics are the salt of life, it is equally certain that divine contemplatives are the salt of Catholicity. The priesthood, quite as much or more than the laity, depends for its Apostolic zeal upon the virtue and the devotion of mystical souls. We cannot altogether dissociate the Apostolic life from the life of prayer, but unless busy and distracted missioners knew that their hands were being strengthened and their omissions expiated by the consecrated spouses of Christ, they would be in a worse danger of materialization than they actually find themselves. Nor is the influence of our contemplatives restricted to the Catholic body. Even when ordinary citizens rail at the uselessness of monks and nuns, they are not unaware (unless grossly or purposely ignorant) that there is or may be real virtue within the convent walls. At least they seem to realize, better perhaps than some Catholics, that the monastic system is a vital element in Catholic life; and little as they wish it, in their hearts they guess that some secret beyond

their ken would alone account for the heavy sacrifices which they find Catholics making for their religion.

Therefore our conclusion is, to make strong distinction between the mystical and the Apostolic life is a mistake arising from a superficial view of Christianity. The prayer, and what is almost as important, the example of those who give their time to contemplation is as precious as is the most self-denying work of missioners in the external order. So far from being outcasts from the world, monks and nuns are its most efficient helpmeets.

Hitherto we have considered the theory of organized contemplation; but there is a practical aspect. The question may be asked: "Do mystics themselves hold our view about their office? Do men, and especially women, when they enter contemplative orders think of the needs of humanity, or rather are they not actuated by the needs, as they suppose, of their own souls?" Here it is just to make a distinction. We could not perhaps assert with truth that all such novices are equally influenced by the altruistic motives we have been describing. I had recently occasion to consult a very experienced superior of an order which is enclosed and mainly contemplative, practising perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, (although combining with this, work for souls in a subordinate degree). It is her distinct belief that at entrance the majority of their postulants come to seek relief from the world rather than to provide spiritual

strength for it. But, she added very emphatically, our subjects are not long with us till they imbibe a thoroughly Apostolic spirit; and the longer they stay with us, and the more united they become to God, the more generous are their dispositions and the more ardent is their zeal for souls. She could not imagine how anyone could live any time in Religion without becoming dead to the thought of self and aflame with desire for God's glory and the conversion of sinners. This is to my mind a satisfactory view of the case. When you judge of a physical machine, you look at what comes out of it rather than at what goes into it. So with any system of mental training, one should look at the results. The Catholic Church wants men and women; children are possibilities only, not the finished article.

As the classical example of this Apostolic spirit among nuns we cannot look to anything better than the spirit of the Carmelite Order as revealed to us by St. Teresa. She wrote to her daughters in the *Way of Perfection:*[1] "Help me, my sisters in Jesus Christ, to pray for all the sinners who are being lost. It is for this object that our institute brings you all here together. This is your avocation, your business. All your desires should tend to this end. For this should your tears flow, for this you should multiply your prayers. . . . What shall I say? The world is in flames. Those unhappy

[1] Translation by Lady Lovat; see *A Life of Saint Teresa*, pp. 252–3.

heretics would condemn our Lord, so to speak, once more to death, since they raise a thousand false witnesses against Him, and seek to destroy his Church. Can we lose a moment's time over trifles with this thought before us?" She adds: "Let us help the servants of our King." But, you may rejoin, why go to the help of those who are much holier than we are? I will tell you the reason. Do you understand, my daughters, what you owe to God for having delivered you from the dangers of the world? It is a great happiness and privilege, and one that these apostles of God have not got, in these days least of all, for they have to strengthen the weak, to encourage the little ones. It is necessary for them to live amongst men in order that they should speak to them, appear in their great houses, and sometimes live the same lives exteriorly that they do. Does it require, think you, but a small exercise of virtue to live in the world, treat with it, adopt even its ways, and yet remain in heart and soul not only apart from it, but an enemy of it, and so live on earth as if in exile? I implore of you to work in such a manner as to become pleasing in the sight of God, that thus you may obtain great graces for his defenders. If we could contribute to this by our prayers, we also shall have fought, we, in the depths of our solitude, for God's cause."

This is the true Joy of Battle, without which no one can be an Apostle of Christ in a high degree. In conclusion, we appeal to those who, like the

writer, can claim a little firsthand knowledge of the subject, to say whether St. Teresa had done more than put into clear words the spirit which animates the contemplative nun of today who is normally fervent. It made a great impression on my mind to be told by an old Carmelite Prioress long since dead, (she had been a convert from Anglicanism, but had immense experience of her order) that her nuns were so busy that they had no time to mope, and, moreover, that she always found them as "gay as larks." How little the world suspects all this!

CHAPTER X.

In What Does Sanctification Consist?

We have seen something of the close connection of divine contemplation with sanctity, and we propose in the present chapter to see whether we cannot obtain some light upon the nature of Mysticism by following the clue that has appeared. Sanctification may be considered in its totality; it may also be analysed into its constituents. If we take it under the first aspect, it will appear as a new sort of life, bestowed by God upon some of his creatures in such wise that they are thereby made participators in what is essentially divine. The sanctified are not, of course, divine in the sense in which Christ, having no created personality, was divine: but, being members of his mystical body, they are adopted by him as his brethren, and acquire some participation in his privileges as Son of God. Thus to be sanctified means to be endowed with a life radically different from, and superior to, the life of a human being as such, and hence the state of grace is said to be supernatural in the fullest sense. It is not easy at first to understand how an order of existence can be raised to a level higher than its own; but we might make

use of a kind of analogy to explain it. Could we not imagine how some animal (an anthropoid, if there is such a thing) could be suddenly endowed with the gifts of reason and moral consciousness? The parallel is not quite exact, because a brute raised to the human level would in reality cease to be a brute (though he might perhaps appear to be one); whereas a man raised to a supernatural existence does not cease to be a man, but all his human attributes become intensified and still more *humanized.* Still perhaps the case we have imagined may serve as an illustration. Anyhow, a Christian is already become in a singular sense the friend of God. He has in him principles in virtue of which he will one day be on a still higher level with God, for he will see him as he is and love him as he ought to be loved. That presupposes perseverance; he is now in a probationary state, and is conditioned by living in a mortal body, so that he cannot yet be admitted to the banquet on which the angelic host is feeding. The state of grace is, however, a real pledge of that glory which, if all goes well, he will ultimately reach. A child may have a right to an inheritance which he cannot yet enjoy; and the Saints are truly "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ." [1] We cannot possibly gain anything like a true notion of sanctity unless we consider it in relation to the beatific vision, although it does not actually import the same, here and now. The new nature which is

[1] Rom. VIII, 17.

conferred by sanctifying grace is called Regeneration or being born anew.[1] One result of this new birth is that the sanctified person becomes so dear to God that God is said to dwell within each soul that has this gift of regeneration or divine grace. This doctrine of the "inhabitation of the Holy Ghost" in the Christian is most wonderful, and is very clearly expressed in Scripture. We are told, for instance, that God specially visits and dwells in the hearts of the just; that the Christian man is the Temple of God, which "if any man violate him will God destroy";[2] that "the charity of Christ is poured forth in our hearts *by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.*"[3] This gift of inhabitation, though specially attributed to the Holy Spirit, extends of necessity to the other Divine Persons: so that our Blessed Lord declared that if anyone loved Him, "my father will love him, and we will come to him and *make our abode* with him."[4] The difficulty arises that God is everywhere and therefore it seems impossible to understand how he can in real truth come to any heart to dwell in it, if he be already there. Theologians, however, have devised a method of explaining this

[1] Nicodemus saith, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again? Jesus answered Amen, amen, I say to thee unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven. (St. John III, 4).

[2] 1 Cor. III, 16.

[3] Rom. V, 5.

[4] St. John XIV, 23.

special presence of God in the soul, by saying that if we could suppose or imagine the case of one to whom God's ordinary presence did not extend (a quite impossible supposition, it is true, but we can use it in our thoughts), then if such a soul were to be sanctified, God would at once approach it by his special presence or inhabitation. The thing is none the less real because it is in a certain sense anticipated by some other thing. The fact is that God is really present in the sanctified soul after a new manner, on a new title, and so as to constitute a new relationship. We can also realise this analogically from the case of the Blessed in heaven. Certainly they are present to God, and He to them after a new manner and with a new relationship; for they are now fixed in the friendship of God for all eternity;—a thing which cannot be said of the man who is merely in a state of grace, which he may lose any day.

When the Holy Ghost takes possession of a human soul He becomes as a Spouse, and thus brings certain gifts which we may consider in the light of a dowry. As there are seven deadly sins, anyone of which would expel him (in case of its commission in a deadly degree), so he brings Seven Gifts, each one of which is specially opposed to a particular sin. And these Gifts are also of great importance in strengthening and beautifying the soul.

But these seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are not, if we may use this language, the most essential

part of sanctification. That is to say, they must be viewed as derivative from something else which is more fundamental, something which could exist, at least according to our thinking, without the Seven Gifts, though they could not exist without it. We are now taking a psychological standpoint, *i. e.,* we are about to use analysis in the search for the root-principle of the soul's sanctification.

What have we learned about sanctification when viewed in its totality? First, that it makes the soul a "partaker in the Divine Nature"; [1] and secondly, that it is a foretaste of the Beatific Vision. God's own nature is concerned with his essential acts of the knowledge and love of Himself. And the Beatific Vision also consists in the knowledge and love of God. Therefore, the *essential* thing in regeneration is a new power of knowing and loving God. By Divine Faith we know him supernaturally, and by Hope and Charity we love Him also supernaturally. In these virtues and in the state of grace in which they are rooted and fixed, we find that which is most essential in regeneration.

These greater virtues are abiding qualities; and besides the Seven Gifts (to which we shall devote some special attention in a later chapter) there are other supernatural qualities or virtues implanted in the souls of the just. But all others may be considered as derivative from the three theological virtues:—Divine Faith, Divine Hope, Divine Charity. Their importance depends upon

[1] 2 Pet. I, 4.

their theological character, that is to say, their object is *primarily* God Himself. They have, it is true, secondary objects also. In the case of charity this is only too clear, because we use the word so frequently regarding what is *charitable* to our neighbor, that we are in danger of forgetting that charity relates primarily to God.[1] This, then, is our first proposition regarding these theological virtues,—that they excel every other kind of virtue because they relate to God alone as their *primary* object.

Now we have to go farther: we must distinguish between Divine Faith and Divine Love.[2] In one sense Love is far more important. St. Paul makes this clear: "Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, but the greatest of these is charity."[3] Faith will not save us: charity will. Faith by itself, that is when it does not eventuate in good works (which are the expression of charity), is sterile, or, as St. James says, dead.[4]

But our quest is psychological. If we view these virtues analytically, we see at once that Faith is the ultimate foundation of the whole supernatural structure. By this we mean that if we can penetrate the supernatural character of Divine Faith,

[1] If we love our neighbour for any inferior reason than that he represents God, this would not be Divine Charity. But we cannot prosecute this subject further.

[2] For our present purpose we may regard Hope as imperfect Love, and Charity as the same perfected.

[3] 1 Cor. XIII, 13.

[4] St. James, II, 20; see also I, 22–25.

we shall have but little difficulty in regard to the rest. Normally and, if we may so speak, spontaneously, Hope and Charity spring from Faith. Not, we reflect, necessarily, nor even universally, but according to ordinary psychology. We should regard it as something monstrous that a man or a woman had real faith in God without trying to love him. Without Charity, Faith is said to be dead, so it is not of much account except in so far as it may be called to life.

This principle, which is of enormous consequence, comes from the fact that love springs out of knowledge, that our love for any person or thing is conditioned by our knowledge of the same. If our knowledge were defective, our love would be so also; if our knowledge is for any reason specially elevated, our love will (naturally) share in the same elevation. This is so true that if we want to know whether an act of a virtue, say contrition or humility, is supernatural, we ask: "Is it founded upon supernatural Faith?" It is the same even in the case of the other theological virtues. If the faith on which they rest is supernatural, we judge them to be the same; whereas no act or virtue can be regarded as supernatural unless it be founded upon supernatural Faith.

Therefore, from this point of view, our question seems to resolve itself very much into the question: What is Divine Faith? Can we understand or explain in any way its nature? If we can, we shall *eo ipso* have gone a long way towards understand-

ing in what sanctification consists. We must premise that considered on its theological side this subject is one of notorious difficulty; but that must not prevent us from the attempt to elucidate it according to our best capacity.

We shall have to consider, then, the nature of an act of Divine Faith both on its rational side (for it is rational, *i. e.,* it is not irrational) and also on its supernatural side. When these two aspects are treated separately, the difficulty is not great;—it is in combining the two qualities into a complete unity that we find the trouble. Theologians agree in discerning two distinct acts or phases in the intellectual process which we call Faith. The first is wholly and exclusively rational and natural;[1] the second (without ceasing to be rational) becomes supernatural.

This is what happens. A mind first thinks by its own and natural powers, collects evidence, reasons upon it, comes to a conclusion. Now, it will not do to say merely, "I see reason to accept this proposition; and therefore assent to its truth." The intellect may say this, and often does, but such a mental state has no direct relation to Faith. It is only an ordinary judgment, or purely intellectual act. Faith implies trust in some external standard, some authority, which in the case we are considering is God. Therefore, what the rea-

[1] We do not mean to deny the possibility of special assistance from God in such preliminary acts; but merely to assert that strictly speaking they do not require it.

son, in its preliminary act asserts, is not the intrinsic credibility of the proposition, but the fact that God is revealing it as true. This conclusion is reached by reason, and it is not yet the act of Divine Faith.

The soul sees at this point that it can reasonably, and therefore ought to, go farther. It makes a new assertion, as, for instance, "I believe that God created heaven and earth." Here we do not affirm what is merely a reasonable proposition (we are not now discussing whether it would be reasonable to state this truth apart from the fact of revelation). But "I believe that God created" means (in the theological sense of the words), "I trust to the authority of God who has declared this, or revealed it. I accept the statement on His authority." As we have already stated, such an act of Faith *directly* concerns the secondary object of the virtue; which is some proposition, not God himself. But anyone can see that *indirectly* Faith in the primary object (which is God, as veracious) is also affirmed, and necessarily, by the mere fact of assenting to any proposition on the word of God.

The act of Faith has a supremacy about it. There is no room in it for doubt. Human reason sometimes sees ground for a possible doubt even when it assents to a proposition. But in the act of Faith the faculty cannot rest its weight upon that necessary antecedent proposition, nor upon any reasons which it sees. It must rest its weight

upon God, upon God alone. Now, unassisted by supernatural grace, human reason can never go beyond its own powers of reasoning and of assenting for its own motives. It would only stultify itself if it tried to do so.

Although theologians are not agreed on all points as to the ultimate explanation of the act of Faith, they do agree in what we have laid down, namely, (1) that the act of reason pronouncing motives for believing are good *must* precede the act of Faith even in point of time; (2) That such a previous act cannot really *motive* the act of Faith which follows it: if it did, the act of Faith would be an ordinary natural assent, not an act which belongs to the supernatural order of mentality.

From this peculiar character of Faith (by virtue of which it is, as we have said, not irrational, but supra-rational) another character follows, which is a degree of certainty all its own. It is the certainty that God is true, that He cannot err or deceive. It is like an oath sworn by the name of God,—it has thrown its whole weight and all its responsibility upon the veracity of a divine revelation.

Therefore, our first conclusion is that Faith is something supernaturally infused into the human faculty of (mental) assertion, and that it is endowed with a kind of certainty which far excels all human knowledge, even that which appears most self-evident. It is of a higher order.

But we have not yet concluded our analysis. The act of Faith has another character, which we must examine carefully, for it concerns our argument even more vitally than what has preceded. Theologians declare that in Faith the quality of Obscurity is so inherent as to be of its essence. What does this mean? Does it mean that Faith deals with subjects which are obscure to our minds because belonging to an ambit which is above their natural powers? For instance, in certain mysteries, as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Transubstantiation, and even the Beatific Vision, the material presented to our Faith is certainly obscure to our minds. It is most important for our purpose to understand that the Obscurity of Divine Faith does not depend on the nature of the material object. For this Obscurity is *essential* to the act of Faith considered in itself and quite independently of its object. It will make the meaning of this clear if we consider that God at times reveals truths which are in some sense clear to our reason also. For instance, He has revealed his existence (we say, I *believe* in God the Father Almighty—this truth is not considered in itself supra-rational).[1]

So again the immortality of the soul, the founda-

[1] It would be heretical to state that the existence of God cannot be proved by reason, just as it would be heretical to state that the doctrine of the Trinity *can* be so proved. Both these truths fall equally under revelation, and Divine Faith in each of them is equally *obscure* (in the theological sense which we are now considering.)

tion of morality, or an absolute distinction between good and evil (denied by modern materialists), probably the creation of the world, and (according to some, but this is very doubtful) the resurrection of the body, are natural truths believed supernaturally.

This Obscurity, therefore, we assert, is essentially inherent in all Divine Faith. Why so? Because in making any act of Faith whatever, the reason is carried beyond its own natural illumination. It has outstripped its own nature, it has taken its leap into a region which is dark to itself.

Yet this darkness is also a place of bright light. The Psalmist said, the word of God is "a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths." [1] This is part of the paradox of all faith and of all Mysticism, and we cannot entirely remove it, though we may try to show wherein it lies. Thus it is that in cases even where the mind sees clearly the truth of a proposition, it cannot rest its faith upon the *intrinsic rationality* of the doctrine believed. You may say, "I *also* see that the doctrine is a reasonable one in itself,—but that is not my motive; *I believe it on the word of God.*" This alone is an act of Divine Faith. And it is this necessity which causes the Obscurity of Faith to be one of its most distinguishing characters. We shall very soon see the bearing of this upon our argument. But before doing so let us consider a little further the

[1] Ps. CXVIII, 105.

psychology of Divine Faith. In our analysis we had to consider it as though it constituted an isolated fact. But this, of course, is not so. In reality faith is an ever-active, ever-energising principle, which is perpetually reacting upon the intellectual faculty, invigorating it, permeating it, and giving it fresh illumination. We have already stated that the natural intellect of itself has but a feeble action when apprehending God. The idea of Absolute Being which it can form to itself is true as far as it goes, but is vague, abstract, without form,—something like the gibbering spectres which Homer gives as the ghosts of his heroes. They were like a wraith of mist. Faith comes to the rescue, it apprehends God the Revealer, as something more clear, more substantial than reason depicts. The will intervenes, it helps to strengthen the intelligence, which now fixes itself upon the motives favoring the truth of the revelation, and this again gives strength to the reasoning faculty. Such a view of action and reaction of the faculties is truly psychological and may be illustrated to some extent by the analogy of merely natural processes. In all mental training the earliest apprehension of an object is generally weak and vacillating. The truth apprehended is unfamiliar, vague, and somewhat unreal:—let it be the study of mathematics, astronomy, some branch of philosophy, or even of the historical sciences. By further experience we gain fresh motives for assent to propositions; they seem less strange,

whether owing to our own reasoning or the influence and authority of a teacher. As the spirit becomes more concentrated on the study, our ideas grow clearer, less shadowy; doubts and difficulties disappear or at least recede into the background. By degrees we find that our faculties are responding with alacrity to the calls upon them, we become interested, the effort becomes a labor of love, we are progressing by leaps and bounds. What at first seemed almost impossible is now becoming both easy and delightful: we can hardly recognise that we are the same person, so alert is our intelligence, so efficiently is it carrying out its task.

If, then, in our ordinary mental action the reasoning faculty shows so great a pliability, we can hardly feel surprise that owing to the introduction of a new element into our thought—and that a so-called theological virtue—the powers of the soul are sensibly quickened, and the effect of Faith is to stimulate the reasoning powers to act with renewed facility and force. This is what St. Bernard referred to when he spoke of *"Fides quaerens intellectum*—Faith seeking intelligence." The poor rationalist inverts this principle when he thinks that Faith should be so entirely subordinate to the natural intelligence, that he refuses to believe anything as revealed, but merely assents to what his natural faculty can prove and comprehend!

From this point of view we allow that it is necessary not merely to admit but to emphasise the influence of volition in our supernatural life. Be-

cause in a former chapter we protested against asking more from the will than it can supply, that is, a fair and square explanation of the problem of divine contemplation—we are all the more anxious to escape the fatal error of undervaluing the real power of the will in its proper sphere, which is to steady the understanding but not to enlighten it. We must also make it plain to the reader that, when we lay so much stress upon the intellect in its proper sphere, we realize that the kind of intelligence which it produces has nothing academic about it. It has been said rightly that any old apple-woman in the streets may love God with a greater intensity than the most highly trained theologian. All we say is that if she does love God, her mind has been specially illuminated by Faith as part of the process by which her heart has been set on fire. This appears to us to be sound psychology, and we believe that most theologians, more especially those of the school of St. Thomas, are very clear about the importance of mental illumination in the scheme of sanctification. We have laid our main stress upon Divine Faith, not as though it were the sole or even the chief element in sanctity, but as being the most fundamental,—that which, if it can be grasped, the other elements follow easily in due course. Of course, the greatest of all the gifts of God in this life is sanctifying grace, which is not a quality of any faculty, but something rooted in the very substance of the soul. But although divine grace in this sense is not to

be identified with the theological virtues, not even with Charity,[1] yet the connection between them is so close that, given the existence of one, you can infallibly postulate the presence of the other.

Hence our conclusion with regard to the essence of sanctification is that we cannot hope to understand it better than by concentrating our attention upon the virtue of Divine Faith. Even though this branch of our subject is theoretically a difficult one, yet we believed that it would repay us to consider it somewhat deeply. Thus we have endeavored to analyse certain qualities which must be found in every act of Divine Faith; and it now remains to see whether the facts we have observed will throw a special light upon the nature of mystical contemplation?

We reserve this question for the two following chapters.

[1] One school of theologians do actually identify the gift of sanctifying Grace, with divine Charity; but this is not the prevailing doctrine, and only deserves mention here because it seems to illustrate the close connection between Charity and grace.

CHAPTER XI.

Divine Faith and Mysticism.

It is the object of this essay, not to propound any unwonted theory of contemplation (God forbid!), but to bring into a strong light one plain principle which we believe is in danger of being thrust out of sight. This principle is the very orthodox and well-worn statement that *mystical prayer is nothing but a sublime exercise of Divine Faith and of the other gifts which are infused along with Faith into the souls of the baptized.* It is to the writer something of a mystery to find that in many modern treatises which are otherwise admirable, the part played by the virtue of Divine Faith in all, even the highest contemplation, is denied, or called into question, or treated cursorily. It would be easy to give instances of such deficiency in this regard, but we prefer not to do so, because we think our end will be better attained if we employ our remaining space in exposition rather than in mere criticism of previous writers.

In the first place we notice a coincidence. Writers on Mysticism certainly have always found it difficult to establish a clear and satisfactory theory of divine contemplation. On the other hand,

theologians find a difficulty quite as great (to put it at its lowest) in explaining the act of Faith.[1] May it be that dogmatists and mystics are here dealing not with two different themes, but the same theme under different aspects?

This impression will be indefinitely deepened if we merely look back over the ground we have covered and compare the description we gave in our Chapters V and VI of mystical prayer and the characterisation we aimed at giving in our last chapter of the nature of Divine Faith.

The problem before us has been this. Mysticism certainly implies a specific sort of knowledge of God, His Nature and attributes, but this knowledge must be something which is radically different from natural knowledge,—which becomes negative as soon as it leaves the thought of creatures to think on the Divinity,—and also from the beatific knowledge which is called Vision because it is direct. Now, we proceed to ask, would it not be difficult to find words which could express more clearly the place occupied by the theological virtue of Faith in our intelligence? Is it not a specific sort of knowledge of God (who is its primary object), and does it not radically differ in its nature both from ratiocination and from vision?[2] We do not pretend that we have just given a strict defini-

[1] Many deep-thinking students and professors of theology consider this is *the* crux of their science.

[2] Faith is like Vision in that its own act is direct, *i. e.*, it is not ratiocinative. It is unlike Vision in that it presupposes ratiocination, which Vision does not.

tion of Faith, but we do claim that our description indicates the lines to which any definition will have to conform. Therefore, we find a sufficiently striking *primâ facie* correspondence between the demand made by our problem and what our description of Divine Faith is able to supply. But it is when we look more closely at the data we have collected, that we shall find ourselves almost forced to conclude that there is not merely a superficial correspondence, but an inner identity, between Divine Contemplation and Divine Faith.

The two specially marked qualities which appear according to our judgment to characterise contemplation on its psychological side, were, first, its infused and "passive" character, and, secondly, the "obscurity" which is given by all the best authorities as an essential mark of mystical contemplation. Mystics grasp some idea of God, but it is always as something dark, a blankness, what is called by an unknown author, the "Cloud of Unknowing." But these are also proved to be the two most essential qualities of Faith. According to theology, Divine Faith is essentially supernatural and infused; it is entirely beyond the range of natural cognition, though always presupposing it; and it has the essential note of Obscurity. We must, of course, bear in mind that there are various degrees and kinds of the Obscurity that mystics find it so difficult to describe. Sometimes it is true, they describe their experience under the form of light. God at times communicates to their

spirit an intense joy, which, being felt in the inmost core of the soul, seems to flood the whole being with a kind of ineffable irradiation. This feeling of a bright light is not truly incompatible with the fact that while they gaze upon God, they still are conscious most poignantly of a vast, almost unapproachable, Darkness. How this can be, light and darkness simultaneously combined in a view of God,—let the mystics explain if they can. But we know that they cannot. One thing alone will help us to understand it, and that is the theology of Faith. Thus we see stronger evidence at every turn of the substantial identity of Mysticism with a theological virtue. But what appears to us to clinch the argument is the relation which each of these two things has to essential holiness. For if it be really true that genuine Mysticism carries with it *ex naturâ rei* a proportionate degree of sanctity, it follows that it must be also an exercise of that theological virtue which we have seen underlies all holiness and is its most fundamental constituent. We are still, as always, taking it for granted that there is no sharp opposition between Faith and Works (except in those strange and melancholy cases of a Faith that is wholly inoperative).

If this doctrine were to be seriously called into question, we should be forced to conclude that in the Christian mystic there are at work two spiritual forces, each of them so like the other that their leading characteristics are identical, each of them

tending directly and almost necessarily to the promotion of holiness, and yet that these two principles are diverse in their inmost essence. But if we find that Divine Faith is of a nature to produce the very results that are to be expected from pure and genuine contemplation, why should we still beat about to find some other principle working within the soul of the mystic?

There may be difficulties attaching to this theory of Mysticism;—would it not be strange if there were not? We reserve the chief of them for a special chapter which will follow this one. Meanwhile we will quote some important authorities in support of our statement.

It is natural for a member of his family to appeal first to the authority of St. Ignatius, who was not merely an eminent mystic in the practical sense, but also, if rightly understood, has done very much in his Exercises to make the mystical path at once secure and facile.

That the Soldier-Saint identified mystical contemplation with Faith and the other theological virtues that spring from Faith, is made fairly clear by the teaching of the "Discretio Spirituum." These rules, which are intended to dig deeply into the basis of spirituality, mainly proceed on the lines of the contrast between desolation and consolation, and the causes which produce them. Plainly a definition of consolation is needed, and it is given by the statement that, besides the feeling of joy, which is obvious, it consists in an in-

crease of Faith and the other theological virtues. Now it is always assumed by commentators that by this increase (*augmentum*) of Faith, Hope, and Charity the author means an increase in the perception of these virtues,—because otherwise they could hardly have any relation to the subject in hand, which is Consolation. I see no objection to this line of interpretation, but I ask: Why did St. Ignatius restrict his enumeration of the virtues to these three, except that he realized that their exercise is really the substance of the prayer which he was discussing? Their real augmentation is taken for granted, it did not require to be noted. What he notes is that, as soon as that augmentation becomes felt, then and then only does sensible consolation supervene. The more this argument is pondered, the more force it will gather. What strikes the writer most is that the presupposition we have pointed out is so clear to St. Ignatius that he simply takes it for granted and passes on to the point he thinks it necessary to emphasise.

This doctrine of the importance of Divine Faith as the true explanation of Mysticism has been abundantly illustrated by most of the great writers upon the subject particularly those of the Renaissance period. The matter is well summarized by the Eudist, Fr. E. Lamballe, whose book [1] has been of much service to the present writer. He

[1] Mystical Contemplation (English version) Washbourne, 1913. See especially Chap. I, entitled "The Nature of Contemplation."

especially appeals to St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and St. Francis of Sales, surely all first-class authorities. The matter is so clear, and is indeed admitted especially as regard St. John of the Cross, even by thinkers who find this theory scarcely, if at all, tenable. We will content ourselves with giving a couple of extracts which are very clear. In *A Spiritual Canticle* [1] the great Carmelite writes: "The soul vehemently desiring to be united to the Bridegroom and seeing that there is no help or succour in created things, turns towards Faith, as to that which gives the most vivid vision of the Beloved, and adopts it as the means to that end. And indeed there is no other way of attaining to true union, to the spiritual espousals of God, according, to the words of the prophet, 'I will espouse thee to me in Faith.' And again in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel:* [2] "The effect of visions may be felt in the substance of the soul through the instrumentality of a loving knowledge, in the most sweet touch and union pertaining to spiritual impressions. . . . I shall treat it when I speak of the mystical, confused, or obscure intelligence, and explain how in this loving and obscure knowledge, God unites himself with the soul, eminently and divinely. For this loving and obscure knowledge which is Faith, serves in a manner in this life as means of the divine union, as the light of glory hereafter serves for Beatific Vision."

[1] Stanza XII (Transl. by Lewis).
[2] Book II, Ch. 24.

Notice here how St. John again and again emphasises the "obscurity" of mystical knowledge, the "dark night" of sense and the spirit. This is ever in his mind, and he sees the true explanation of it in the Catholic doctrine of Faith. The concluding sentence of the extract last quoted seems to us to be quite conclusive. It gives the quintessence of St. John's teaching and of all sane teaching about contemplation. Needless to say he is followed closely by St. Teresa.

As the subject is so important, we should like to add the very clear testimony of Fr. Suarez to the same view. He not merely asserts our doctrine strongly, but uses it as a basis of argument for explaining certain statements in the *Summa* of St. Thomas, which contain no small difficulty to the student.

Speaking for himself, while discussing the question whether ratiocination (*discursus*) is required, and if so how, for the act of contemplation, he says:[1] "Contemplation therefore in this life, however lofty it may be, is nothing but a certain practice and exercise of supernatural Faith, but formally or fundamentally, because (apart from special privileges) there is in this life no knowledge more lofty of truths which are entirely supernatural." A few lines previously[2] he had given the reason for this statement: "Contemplation as it requires on the part of the will the most perfect

[1] *Tract. de Oratione*, Lib. II, Cap. X, n. 4.
[2] *Ib.*, n. 3.

operation, which is the love of charity, so on the part of the intellect it should consist of the most perfect operation; but the act of Faith is the most perfect of all those which we can have about God in this life, for it excels even the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, because the theological virtues are more perfect than the Gifts."

Before discussing this last statement, which introduces a very important consideration for us, we will add a few lines to show how Suarez applies this doctrine to the elucidation of St. Thomas. The latter, who is not so explicit as the Jesuit theologian upon the relation of Divine Faith to contemplation, (though he appears to assume it) [1] had remarked, (1) that "contemplation is simple and without ratiocination," and (2) that "in it no error can be ever detected." Both statements appear difficult to Suarez; but he says of both that they can be explained if contemplation is understood to be an exercise of Divine Faith, of which the acts are *per se* both simple and immune from error.[2]

We now put a difficulty regarding the Angelical Doctor's teaching. Is it not a fact that he mainly

[1] E. g., discussing the various grades of contemplation, he seems to be thinking of Divine Faith when he says that the sixth and highest consists in the consideration of "things which are intelligible but which reason can neither discover nor hold (*capere*)." IIa, II æ, Qu. CLXXX, art. IV, ad. 3). St. Thomas always lays great stress upon the work of the intellect in mystical contemplation.

[2] *Loc. cit.*, No. 5.

attributes mystical contemplation to the Gifts of the Holy Ghost? If so, how is this view compatible with the Suaresian doctrine that it belongs to the theological virtue of Divine Faith? The reader may recollect that this subject was touched upon more than once in previous chapters and that we postponed its consideration for a later opportunity.

We followed this course, not because we were unaware of the importance of the Gifts; it was rather because we desire to give them the attention they deserve, without however infringing upon the line of thought we were following. From a practical point of view especially, it is desirable that due prominence should be given to this topic, because anything that brings confidence in the Gifts of the Holy Ghost tends to produce in the soul a devotion to His Person, and certainly there is no more speedy and secure method of acquiring the art of contemplation than this. Devotion to the Third Person of the Trinity is extending itself rapidly among all classes of the Faithful, and with it we ventured to connect that revival of Mysticism which is so remarkable a feature of modern Christianity.

Let us now return to the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, and examine, as well as we can, his attitude regarding the Seven Gifts. Undoubtedly he sees in them an explanation of Divine Contemplation; and so far from finding in this any difficulty, we believe that, when St. Thomas's view is accu-

rately stated, it will be found to supply a strong confirmation of our own thesis.

In order to understand this question, we must consider the relation of the Gifts to the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. For it is such that the two sets of qualities cannot be put into competition with each other. The Gifts are not regarded by St. Thomas, if we understand his language, as habits which can produce acts of their own; they merely assist the virtues to act more excellently and with greater facility. We might liken them to the oil which is added to machinery, not to supersede the power which drives it, but to improve the smoothness and the efficiency of the wheels and the cranks. St. Thomas says: "The Gifts excel the ordinary perfection of the Virtues, not as regards the quality of their effects (*genus operum*), as the counsels excel the precepts; but as regards their way of acting (*modus operandi*), inasmuch as man is moved by a higher principle (*i. e.,* the Holy Ghost using the Gifts)." This sentence requires to be well pondered before it can be thoroughly penetrated. We believe that it entirely confirms our view that St. Thomas' doctrine about the Gifts (which is admittedly one of his greatest contributions to theology) is that the Gifts do not operate independently of the virtues, but that they do enable the latter to operate after a superior fashion. Thus we repeat to attempt to bring the Gifts into competition with the virtues is futile. Let us try to make this point

clearer. Let us suppose, for the sake of the argument, that the gifts did not exist or were inoperative. The virtues would produce their proper acts, but in a more ordinary degree. There would be less heroism, less docility to the Will of God, less swiftness in obedience. The soul would not be carried along the most arduous paths even in the active life, and the mystical life would be torpid, if it could thrive at all. Though the action of virtue is supernatural, yet the divine touch would be less direct, less clearly marked. When the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are in full action in the soul, its human action appears to be almost suspended (though it really never ceases to be free); at least it has become an instrument in God's hands. When God plays upon the faculties, endowed as they already are with the theological virtues, it is like the fingers of a musician playing over the keys of a piano, while the strings may be compared to the virtues. The music depends upon the strings, their sonority is the same, but the music elicited from them depends not merely on them, but on the player's touch. So the theological virtues do not gain any additional power, if we may so put it, from the presence of the gifts, yet their acts, when produced under the influence of the Gifts, become more excellent.

Now the Seven Gifts are infused into the souls of all who receive baptism, or who recover God's grace after losing it, but only in the case of Saints and Mystics do some of them produce their full

effect, (or to speak more accurately according to the Thomistic view), do they enable the theological virtues, and especially Faith to elicit their highest effects. It was through the gifts especially that St. Paul could say "No longer I live, but Christ liveth in me," or St. Ignatius of Antioch when going to meet the beasts in the circus: "Now I begin to be a Christian."

We have spoken of the Gifts as though they had a common activity, but in reality each of them is different and should be separately weighed. We find that three of them, Holy Fear, Piety, Fortitude, have to do with the will; while four appertain to the intellect and are therefore more closely connected with Divine Faith. Three of these, Understanding, Knowledge, and Wisdom, are considered by Suarez to be of special importance for contemplatives,[1] and he gives his reason for this statement as follows: "Through the Gift of Understanding the faculty is elevated to conceive of the things of Faith in a nobler way than by its ordinary powers: by Knowledge and by Wisdom it learns the truth not speculatively so much as practically, moving the will in believing and in loving, to which acts contemplation properly tends." It is quite clear that Suarez sees no opposition between his doctrine about Faith and St. Thomas's view of the Gifts, or he would certainly allude to it.

When Isaias described the gifts as something imparted by the Holy Ghost to the Sacred

[1] *Loc. cit.*, Cap. X, no. 9.

Humanity, he mentions Wisdom first, and couples with it Understanding, and all writers agree that Wisdom is most closely connected with the mystical way. [1] St. Luke speaks of Our Lord increasing in Wisdom and in grace, and Christ is frequently spoken of as being the Wisdom, or the Word of God the Father. In Scripture the Wisdom of God is contrasted with the wisdom of the world, and in fact this Gift seems as though it summed up in some fashion all the other Gifts which are associated with it. So that the fact that Mystical Theology has been commonly identified with Sacred Wisdom testifies to a deep conviction in the Church that nothing can be more sublime than mystical prayer, that it embraces the highest knowledge of God and union with Him of which man is capable in this earth. It also seems to justify the Thomistic view that Mysticism is an exercise of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand the first idea we have of a true mystic is that he is above all others a man of Faith. He has thrown himself and his prayer wholly on God,—not even consciously directing his own faculties, leaning upon God while he prays to Him. Is not this an act of sublime Faith?

There is still some further explanation to be given, but we shall give it as an answer to the objection to our doctrine which will arise spontaneously in a thoughtful mind.

[1] Thus the Ven. Fr. Augustine Baker, O. S. B., entitled his classical work on mysticism "Sancta Sophia" "Holy Wisdom."

CHAPTER XII.

Is Faith a Mystical Virtue?

We are now to consider a difficulty which is at first sight sufficiently formidable, and which no doubt will cause a large number of people to hesitate about accepting the doctrine we have enunciated. The difficulty is as follows: At the outset of this essay we declared that it was our intention to discuss Mysticism in the strictest sense of the term, that we did not intend to water it down to include all sorts of Christian belief and practice, but rather that divine contemplation in its highest and most developed form would be our theme. Now we have attempted to identify Mysticism mainly with the virtue of Faith, which is certainly the basis of the whole Christian life, and not of certain more or less exceptional phases of it. Is there not here some plain incongruity between our promise and its performance?

Writers on the subject have naturally felt this difficulty acutely. On the one hand, they see the weight of authority for explaining the act of true contemplation as an exercise of Faith,—and yet they find it difficult to subscribe to a doctrine which seems almost to deprive Mysticism of its special

character. As an illustration of this attitude of mind we cannot do better than quote from the article already alluded to by Fr. Meleady, O.D.C.[1] A great deal of the article consists in the criticism of various writers, and Fr. Meleady's views are not developed at great length, but on the whole he appears inclined to mediate, and to avoid carefully extremes of every sort. On the particular point we are undertaking to discuss we do not think that he inclines to what is unsound, for he takes St. John of the Cross as his favorite exponent of Mysticism, and we have seen that this writer is the very Coryphaeus of Divine Faith. Yet Fr. Meleady finds the greatest difficulty in the theory, with the result that he expresses himself in a way that appears to induce confusion, and in one place at least (to our mind) incipient error. He says:[2] "It may be said at once that the method of St. John of the Cross presupposes a different and higher kind of faith in mystical contemplation. Faith, in the ordinary sense of the word, is directed to ideas in the mind, to beliefs held by the Christian; but this great mystical Doctor requires for contemplation a faith which is not concerned about ideas or truths in the mind, but which directs the eye of the soul to God Himself, present within us, or more properly speaking, within whom we ourselves are."

Now this statement, if understood properly, is

[1] *Some Questions on Mystical Prayer*, in the *Irish Eccl. Record* for Sep., 1921.

[2] *Loc. cit.*, p. 244.

one to which we can heartily subscribe, and as a matter of fact we believe the writer intends to expound St. John's system accurately; but his language is not guarded enough, especially where he speaks of a different and higher *kind of Faith.* And further on this idea is put more directly and in a way still more open to objection. For he says: "The faith of the mystics, *qua* mystics, that is the faith which is the medium of this mystical union with God, is different and higher than the ordinary faith of the ordinary faithful," and again: "Faith is used in two senses;" and again: "The faith of the mystic is not the medium of his knowledge in the same way that faith is the medium of knowledge of the ordinary faithful soul. In the latter case faith is like the efficient cause of the knowledge; but the faith of the mystic is not the efficient cause of his mysterious knowledge; it is the *conditio sine qua non,* but not a full efficient cause. In mystical contemplation it seems rather that God manifests himself in the cloud than that the faith-gaze of the mystic pierces the enveloping mist and reaches him."

There is so much soundness in all this that one is loth to criticize it, and I want to be very clear that I have quoted the above passages not so much with any desire to refute what the author means, as to illustrate the fact that our thesis contains a real difficulty, which is apt to induce confusion among writers on Mysticism. In other words, while agreeing generally with the Reverend Car-

melite, we think that he has expressed himself incautiously. We do not agree that, baldly, there are *two kinds* of Divine Faith, nor yet that in mystical prayer, the function held by Faith, is merely that of a *sine qua non.* Is it not evident that these expressions, while intended to defend the doctrine of Suarez, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and (as we have maintained at least by implication), St. Thomas, would really undermine it?

Is it not a very serious allegation to state that there can be two kinds of Divine Faith, which is a theological virtue, and the foundation of the whole supernatural structure? Surely it would be better to say nothing about Divine Faith in regard to Mysticism than first to announce that it is the main explanation of the whole thing, and then to say that we do not mean Faith as it is usually meant;—to say that Faith merits the palm, and then that we mean somebody else!

In a somewhat similar way we should be inclined to complain of Professor Howley's treatment of this subject. He appears to be aware that Faith ought to play an important part in Christian Mysticism, and he suggests this, but in a very unemphatic way. He says:[1] "That which we have called the negative idea of God . . . may well be that unknown psychic element in an act of divine faith which marks it off so sharply in our experience from merely human or scientific faith. If

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 271.

that be so, if the metanoetic element in the faith of the everyday Catholic be the latent mystic idea of God, the *prima veritas,* in which and by which we believe, then we have a golden thread which links up the prayer of the most ordinary faithful with the ecstatic vision of the great Saint."

Once more, what is intended is excellent,—but does not this halting phrase, "if that be so," (coming in, too, at the end of the treatise) rather suggest that the writer had not firmly grasped that the principle he so wistfully hints at, is the one true systematic explanation of Christian Mysticism, either proclaimed for such or taken for granted by the most commanding authorities of the Church?

Now we return to our point. No, there is not more than one species of Divine Faith, but there is more than one way in which that virtue can be exercised. We are dealing with human psychology, with mental acts, and philosophy teaches that where human acts are investigated, we must always take account of their object. And we must recall here the definition of all theological virtues, namely, that they have God for their primary object, but that they can also have a secondary object,—this in the case of Divine Faith being any truth revealed supernaturally.

This distinction, as to the object of Faith, is, as it seems to us, sufficient to explain an apparent variation in its exercise. The Primary Object must be included in every act of Faith, or the act would be neither theological nor supernatural;

but when the act is directed solely to the Primary Object, it is Mystical in the highest degree; if there is a secondary object as well, the act becomes less sublime, and this is what happens in the case of what we call ordinary faith. We may revert to the illustration already given from the Apostles' Creed. "I believe in God the Father Almighty," or again, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," is a purer act of Faith in God than the clauses, "Creator of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary" . . . Here we express our Faith in God (as Revealer), but also in the truths of Creation, the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, and so on. Therefore, all this is Divine Faith, but it is by no means a "Mystical" Faith in the technical sense. Ordinary Faith is in point of fact generally conversant with secondary or derived truths; while the Faith of the mystic revolves far more directly about the Primary Object of Faith, being nothing more nor less than Contemplation of God revealed supernaturally.[1] The same distinction may, of course, be observed in regard to the cognate virtues. That of Divine Hope, for instance, will commonly take the form of "I hope for Heaven;" "I hope that God's Providence will watch over me;" "I hope that God will hear and

[1] It is only fair to Fr. Meleady to say that he grasps this distinction in the act of Faith. Our complaint is merely that his language sometimes seems to us to obscure this point of view.

answer my prayer;" and so on. Here the secondary object is prominent, it can never wholly exclude the primary object, but such acts are hardly "mystical." In the case of Charity the distinction between primary and secondary is too obvious to call for remark.

So with the operation of the Seven Gifts. Those relating to the will can in all probability be exercised in mystical prayer,—Holy Fear, Piety, and Fortitude. But if they are so exercised, it will be as directed to God alone. Fear must be holy indeed, there will be no trace of servility, it will be the fear of offending God, not of being punished; Piety towards God alone; Fortitude in doing the naked will of God. So with regard to the gifts of the Intellect (which we said St. Thomas connects more closely with mystical contemplation), Understanding as to the ways of God; Science about the attributes of God; above all Wisdom in the most sublime love and service of God.[1]

In Mysticism the gifts are not necessarily exercised in a heroic degree (though of their nature they are capable of leading towards this), but always in a sublime and pure manner, for Mysticism as such is conversant with God alone. Thus we protest against any statement that the Faith of the Mystic is different *in kind* from ordinary Faith. It would be like saying that distilled water, which is of its nature free from all impurity, is a differ-

[1] Counsel is the only Gift we have not mentioned. It belongs to the ascetic life, which we shall consider later.

ent kind of ordinary water, or that a mother's love for her child is on account of its sublimity of a different kind from ordinary love. It is more perfect, no doubt.

In like manner the faith of a St. Paul or a St. Teresa is something very different from the faith of an ordinary practising Catholic. But it is as the difference between the musical faculty of a Beethoven and that of a butcher boy whistling the newest melody of the music-hall. It is a vast difference,—but the difference is not to be found in the faculty *viewed as such.* Either musician shows a sense of tune, of rhythm, of sonority, of musical expression—of such things are the sonatas made, and of such things the popular tune,—but how differently! Surely it would be false to say that we have *two* musical faculties differing *in kind.* When one sees an objection that Faith is too ordinary a thing to produce what we call Mysticism, one surmises that the objector has not a very deep or true conception of Divine Faith or of any other theological virtue. The older theologians were more discerning, they knew that there neither is nor can be anything more sublime or of greater power than Divine Faith excepting only Vision, for which Faith is the true preparation.

Mystical psychology, as we have tried to explain it, may appear to be a very complicated thing, but analysis is a different thing from practical experience. Let us consider the analogy of natural psychology, and we shall see that the building up

of character is something complicated, but taken as an effect is simplicity itself! Take the case of a man in authority in any walk of life, a soldier, a government official, a successful business man, or even a teacher of boys. How many instincts such a man must acquire in his training. Besides his technical knowledge (which is a comparatively mechanical thing) he must be on the alert to know when to take action and how. In order to prepare him to deal with others, he must learn the habit of self-command, must be able to repress words or movements which would betray his motives, while at the same time trying to be absolutely frank. He has to inspire trust in others, and he must therefore not be distrustful even where he knows that caution may be necessary. Often he must conceal his predilections, and yet he must never show himself unsympathetic. In a word, he must maintain his superiority without ever obtruding it. Such art as government requires does not come easily (no art ever does), and yet when it comes to action, how simple and spontaneous it all is, how instantaneously an average man (if not a fool) judges of things and of persons. Such power appears quite ordinary among the better class of men; society could not go on without the exercise of social virtues, many of which imply a wonderful psychology. If we took the case of great men in science, art, or music, we should find even stronger illustrations of our psychological paradox. Their work appears to be done quite

automatically, yet if we knew all the facts, how complex was the training that went to create a Dante, a Beethoven, a Newton, or a Bacon! They tell us but little of their inner psychology, but we know that their lessons were learned in the school of life and that they found their training hard. Truly each one of their group of instincts was separately developed often in sorrow; their souls quivered like a flame, they were delicately attuned, they learned to energize but half consciously, and the manner of it is human, simple, strong, productive.

And what are the theological virtues, when directed by the gifts of the Spirit, but strong supernatural instincts gradually matured? Their mechanism, as theology seeks to portray it, may appear complex; but their action is simple, direct, half conscious, and very productive. Their end and aim is not social or æsthetic, it is supernatural; it imports uniting a human soul to the Creator, who is also its last End.

The actual question we undertook to consider in this chapter is whether ordinary Faith must be accounted a "mystical" virtue,—and the answer is, we hope, now somewhat clear. The reader may recollect that at the commencement of this essay we distinguished between a wider and a narrower application of the term "mystical," premising that our concern is with the latter meaning. And we now see the ground-cause of that ambiguity. All Divine Faith, even in its most ordinary occurrence,

is of its very essence mystical in that its object is to transcend the things of sense and of reason as founded upon sense. If Faith means not this, it means nothing. But it does not in the least follow that we should incline to the school of writers who try to minimize the real and immense gap which divides this ordinary Faith, this simple elementary Faith of all the Christian people, from that of the contemplative souls. What we maintain in our thesis is that the difference is one rather of degree, of development, than of essential opposition. To make this doctrine clearer has been the main object of our essay, and the reader knows whether it has been an easy task. We have, perhaps, treated the problem on somewhat abstract lines, but it is *au fond* a concrete and a practical problem. All authorities, as we have stated, agree that mystical theology is mainly a practical problem, and any theory about it which does not square with the psychological facts and even help to elucidate them, stands *ipso facto* condemned. We must, therefore, try to apply the test of experience to the doctrine that mystical prayer is radically an exercise of Divine Faith.

When a man makes any act of Faith in revealed truth, he leaves his reason behind him, he plunges into a new world of religious experience. Hitherto he has reasoned about all his intellectual judgments. Now reason itself has told him to make this plunge, and he is warned that henceforth it will be an act of treason to bring his reason to

bear critically upon the doctrines of Faith. That does not mean that he must not reason about them, —he must certainly do so,—but he must not allow that his reason is the final or sufficient test of their truth as objects of Faith. This is a mere matter of avoiding what is self-contradictory. If for the sake of argument and contrast we suppose a case of a man passing suddenly from the rational to the supra-rational,—or, as we more commonly say, from the natural to the supernatural,—state of soul, we should realize what a mental revolution he has undergone. His reason has failed him, not indeed as a guide to life, for all the rational motives which brought him to Faith still abide and do not lose one ounce of their cogency. But his reason can no longer be, as it was, his rule of thought and of conduct. He is now like St. Paul after his vision a blind man, and that is what St. Ignatius means when he says that the obedient man is to be as a dead body in the hands of his legitimate superiors—because the Religious is to be guided by motives of Faith.[1] In another sense the believer in Christianity can say, "Whereas I was blind, I now see." But is not this the paradox which meets us at every turn, that when we are dealing with God in this life, "Darkness becomes as the noon-day"?

Divine Faith, we repeat, has necessarily a note

[1] Not, indeed, that what the superior tells him becomes a matter of Faith, but that the obedience rests ultimately upon Faith as its principle.

of Obscurity; and a man who first gets the Faith is as one groping in the dark. He finds himself in a new world and everything in it is strange to him. At first he cannot trust his own judgment as to what is of faith and what is not. He does not know where to turn. He has many guides, of course, but they do not seem to understand him, and he certainly cannot understand them. Even their attitude to things of Faith may puzzle him; —where he feels secure they are hazy; where he is uncertain, they are without fear. His mind seems topsy-turvey now. He knows that he has got home, but he is in a very distant country. He naturally turns to prayer. He had perhaps tried to pray before his conversion, but his prayer was uneasy, restless, unsatisfying. Now prayer is more peaceful and God is nearer to him, his mind is no longer tossed on a sea of doubts and half-satisfied yearnings. He is not so much like an infant left to himself before he has learned to walk. He has grasped God by a new sort of act, he knows that he has risen out of himself, he is breathing a new and a rarer atmosphere. Prayer now is not the balancing of opposing considerations, it is the concentration of all his mental and moral powers upon One whom he recognises as his only true Friend.

Divine Faith is a simple thing, and that does not make it anything less like Mysticism. It might be urged that the above description of a convert's experience goes beyond the ordinary faith of the traditional Catholic. Yes, but on the other

hand in the case of ordinary people who do not think very deeply or strive very hard to exercise their faith purely, is it not difficult to distinguish in their psychology what is pure Faith as a theological virtue, and what is merely their natural tendency to acquiescence? We do not doubt that traditional Catholics arrive at pure Faith, but when they do, it is by a somewhat different process from that of the convert. He starts from doubt and arrives after his adventures through prayer and pain at acquiescence. The others start from acquiescence and after many searchings of heart and, likely enough, experience of trials, come to a deeper and truer kind of faith, more rational, more stable, purified from dross. When we speak of Divine Faith we must be careful to know what we mean. Much among Catholics that passes for Divine Faith, is at best human faith, and at worst mere prejudice. God makes use of these things, He plants his germ very early in the Catholic's heart, and it thrives and fructifies divinely, but often gradually, and nearly always sub-consciously.

Let us return to our neophyte in the Faith. May we follow him in his prayer, and see whether he will not naturally find himself verging towards the attitude of the thorough mystic? He has already been forced to turn to God alone for guidance in his new and strange surroundings. And what does he find? Light,—yes, but surely darkness, too. He knows that he must not now trust to his own powers;—he left them behind in the old

country. Perhaps he feels certain inspirations to this or that in his prayer and in his exterior life. How is he to know that these inspirations are truly divine? Well, of course he will have a confessor or some prudent guide in the spiritual life. At this critical stage he will certainly be wise to take advice, and he is, if a normal person, sure to do so. But here again, what difficulty he experiences! If his guide be worth his salt, if he has ordinary prudence, he is not going to dictate methods of prayer or come to rash conclusions about the spiritual needs and attractions of a yet untried penitent. Without underrating the help that can be given, especially in the tribunal of penance (and perhaps the strongest help is the demand on the humility and obedience of the soul under direction), surely experienced directors are very well aware that they can go but a small distance in teaching anyone to pray? Sooner or later the convert learns to trust to God alone for help.

What gives him this confidence? Is it not that first and final act of Faith? When he made it, he threw himself on God with all the energy of his heart and soul. He knows what he did, and he knows that he has never retracted, and hopes he will never retract, that act of Faith. It literally gave him new life, new happiness, and such peace of mind as he never dreamed of enjoying in his "rationalistic" days. He now begins to realize what Cardinal Newman said he always realized:

—that there are two luminous points of existence and two only, God and oneself.

Such an attitude of soul towards God and the spiritual life is really "mystical." The convert does not know this as yet, he may never know it. What he knows is that God is trying him to the utmost, and that it is worth while. This is the beginning of Mysticism. He also finds a blankness, an Obscurity in his intellect, which blankness is more luminous to him than the sun at noon-day. This is advancing Mysticism. If he begins to find that he must leave himself to God's direction, secure that his best efforts are less availing than a quiet passive attitude, that his business is merely to empty his soul of distracting thoughts and affections, and that it is the part of God to fill it with Himself, then he may be said fairly to have launched his craft on the boundless main. He is now exercising Faith in a degree that may be called "mystical" in the closest and most technical sense, —because he is now disposing himself to the practice of "passive" prayer. He has still a long journey to travel, but is well started. Henceforth his method will certainly not suffer any essential change. The question occupying us here is whether, in yielding himself to passive prayer, he adopted any attitude of mind which was not already peculiar to him in his original act of Faith? We answer, no!—for two reasons, first of all because the act of Faith is essentially an Obscure act:

and secondly because it involves a really Passive principle as regards the natural faculties. That passivity was not fully developed,—neither was the Mysticism. Both were in the initial stage, and the further stages involve no new principle of importance.

CHAPTER XIII.

Divine Contemplation and the Ascetic Life.

We shall conclude our study of contemplation by an attempt to estimate its true relation to the ascetic life. It will be readily understood that we do not use the term "asceticism" in the popular sense, that is the practice of corporal austerities which may indeed enter into, but does not necessarily pertain to, and certainly does not comprise, the ascetic life properly so called. The mortification of the flesh has always had its recognised place in the spiritual life as understood by Catholics, but it can never be regarded as an end in itself. On the other hand, a steady effort to reduce all our passions, corporal and spiritual, to strict obedience to our will, and to reduce our will to utter subordination to the Will of God, however made known to us, is the very alphabet of spirituality. This is then the true asceticism, the mortification of all that is evil in our complex being, the mortification of the flesh only incidentally, that is, so far as our body is the instrument, or possibly the cause, of unholy egotism.

What we have, therefore, to consider in this final chapter is, how far mystical tendencies conform

to, or can possibly interfere with, those principles of Christian asceticism which faith and experience recommend as conducive to the glory of God and our salvation? This enquiry contains some elements of difficulty, and practically includes the question as to the persons to whom, and the conditions under which, the practice of contemplation in the mystical sense is to be recommended. Our conclusion that this practice is mainly an exercise of the virtue of Faith seems to encourage a large view of the scope of mystical prayer, inasmuch as all Christians are endowed with the theological virtues and thus have planted within them the germ and promise of the higher prayer. But there may be reasons for doubting the truth of such a conclusion: hence it appears that some discussion of these difficult questions naturally arises out of the theory which this essay has propounded. Therefore, without any further apology we venture in all humility to lay the following thoughts before our readers.

We must not attempt to conceal or to minimize the dangers that underlie all spiritual aspiration, and that there is special reason for caution in regard to "passive" states in prayer.[1] Experience

[1] We should like to say in passing that a very common confusion between the so-called prayer of Quiet, and the Quietism that did great harm and was condemned by the Holy See, is wide-spread and causes among the uninstructed a lamentable prejudice against Mysticism. But to enter into historical questions of this kind would take us beyond our scope, as we view it.

teaches that illusions as to divine inspiration are sufficiently common and must be disastrous, especially in the case of persons who imagine they are called to contemplation and prayer when they are merely indulging foolish fancies or wasting time in day-dreams. But that is a very different thing from believing, as some people seem to do, that any mystical tendency (at least outside of contemplative Orders) is a dangerous thing and may indicate a morbid temperament or ill-balanced mind.

Now it is not our province or intention to discuss at length the indications of sanity or insanity among nuns, priests, or lay folk. We have been viewing our subject from a theoretic standpoint, though we do not wish to hide our belief that a clearer understanding of the relation of Mysticism to the ascetic life might materially alter the attitude of many Catholics.

We do not wish to advocate extreme views on the subject. Where we find experienced superiors and directors who dread the very name of Mysticism; and where others apparently equally wise persons are advocating a greatly wider extension of its practice, it seems that we ought to proceed warily, remembering that it is ill playing with edged tools, but also that the possible abuse of a good thing is a poor argument against its use.

One thing is quite certain. A desire for prayer that is, according to our view, undoubtedly mystical is spreading rapidly, not merely in monasteries, but outside of them among all classes of

Catholics. Our generation feels this attraction more and more, and we have elsewhere remarked that the same tendency is manifested at least as strongly outside the Church as within it. We do not of course refer to those deplorable systems of occultism which are notoriously spreading havoc among the beliefs and incidentally among the morals of the people. Such sinister currents of thought and practice do in some way testify to a universal yearning for communion with the unseen;—but our concern is rather with counter-currents of Christian faith and doctrine. These modern Spiritualism seems to set up among non-Catholics who have still some grasp of true theism and watered-down Christianity, and who are naturally appalled at the spiritual chaos and misery which they see around them.

We are going, therefore, to treat our problem not merely as one that is practical in itself, but that in the present state of religious thought must be recognised as having special urgency for Catholics of every description, lay as well as religious, and not less for the well-disposed outside the Church.

Let us in the first place endeavor to state the view of those who believe that a large extension of mystical teaching would be a wrong thing. They would probably incline to the conviction that the proper sphere of strictly contemplative prayer is in the Orders which have been founded for that purpose and which are, therefore, the true home of

Mysticism. Outside of these they would have to admit that certain individual souls may have a real call for passive prayer, but would maintain that such a vocation (which they would consider exceptional) would make itself so strongly felt as to leave no room for doubt regarding such cases. Short of an entire suspension of freedom, their faculties will be so rapt by the Divine Spirit that mystical prayer will have become for them a necessity. But with regard to the mass of souls, whether living under religious vows or not, the case is different. For them the perils of mystical prayer are so serious that they will do well to leave it alone.

These perils are twofold. First, the obvious danger of illusion, that is of pious people imagining that they are following God's will where, in all sober truth, they are following their own. Young religious especially, and women of excitable temperament, reading or even hearing about such topics as the Prayer of Union or of Quiet, Mystical Espousals, Suspension of the Faculties, Passive States,—to say nothing of what is more extraordinary, ecstasy and rapture, mystical sleep, locutions, visions of the imagination or the intellect —applying such teaching to themselves without advice or even much consideration, must only expect to find their peace of mind disturbed, their docility to superiors, and if the evil proceeds far, their very vocation, brought into danger.

But there is a further reason against bringing

forward Mysticism inopportunely. Even where the danger of a loss of mental balance does not exist, where pious souls do not rashly conclude that they are under a special dispensation in regard to their prayer, harm may accrue through "mystical" tendencies to the spiritual life. The first principle of sound asceticism is that it consists quite as much in work as in prayer, and harm may be done to both. Ordinary meditation in which all religious are trained, is of itself a difficult thing; it requires a sustained, not unfrequently a very severe, effort in concentrating the mind and all its faculties upon divine things. What, then, can be the sense of telling ordinary and even youthful religious that such efforts should be suspended in order to give place to "passive" prayer? Is not this a way of encouraging remissness under a specious pretext of a higher good, which may be, in a given case, neither attained nor attainable?

What would be, if possible, worse from a practical point of view, is the danger of generating a taste for passive and contemplative prayer in the souls of those whose main duty it is to devote themselves to active and Apostolic work. Even though contemplation is not wholly incompatible with exterior occupations, is it not evident that, when carried far, it is almost sure to interfere with the perfect performance of exterior duties? Prayer takes up time, it absorbs energy, and it implies a kind of psychical concentration which must withdraw people from outward things and perhaps

render them ill-suited for contact with the life of the world.

I trust that I have fairly stated the objections to a wide extension of mystical prayer; and they appear to me, if I may say so, to have a sufficiently solid foundation when regarded in the light of theory. It is when we come to the light of concrete experience that doubts arise as to these cautions and their necessity. In theory no one could reasonably deny that mystical doctrine is in itself a thing peculiarly liable to abuse in its application. Besides, we have to allow that there are plenty of fools in the world, and pious fools are no better, nay, possibly worse, than the rest. But we are not presuming to lay down rules for managing cranks, visionaries, half-baked religious, and half-idiotic devotees. If our monasteries were full of such people of either sex, it would be better to clear them out, but it would not do much good to reform their methods of prayer. Passive prayer is certainly not suited for people suffering from swelled heads, but may be very good for people suffering from brain-fag, and such people are numerous in convents,—and outside them.

To appeal to experience here is of course difficult, because experience differs, but one must do the best one can. I should hesitate to lay great emphasis on my own record of well over thirty years of frequent contact with religious persons of both sexes, mostly, though not exclusively, belonging to educational or active Orders. But I

seem to have found that most of the experienced directors of my own and of other Orders whom I have heard expressing any opinion on the subject, have agreed substantially in asserting that many nuns suffer from being trained in too rigid a system of prayer, and in fact that often their spiritual life is sorely maimed in this way. It is not often that one hears complaints about young religious that they err by seeking contemplative graces prematurely,—but rather it is not so rare to find novices and others who certainly ought to exercise more freedom than they are trained to exercise, in the direction of tranquil and even "passive" prayer.

But there is also a grave misconception to be dealt with. Those who desire to see a mystical spirit at the present day encouraged rather than repressed, are not actuated, as the supposition seems to be, merely by the high regard they feel for contemplation as such. Supreme as is its importance for the individual who has the happiness of practising it, we do not hold that the aims of the ascetic life can be held to be one whit inferior to those of Mysticism considered in itself. Unless the opponents of our view realize this, they cannot deal with the case dispassionately. This attempt to set up a sort of competition between ideals which, so far from being in conflict, are almost identical, is a miserable mistake, founded in a narrow and one-sided spirituality. So far as my knowledge goes, the advocates of more freedom in

prayer strenuously hold and teach that the Apostolic ideal is the one that should be most kept before the eyes of all religious, whether in active or contemplative communities. The reason why they would like to see the prayer of religious widening out in a contemplative sense is precisely because they do not believe that such prayer can interfere with work or with exterior virtues; but rather that there is no way so easy, direct, and certain to get people to do their duty to their neighbour as to help them to pray better, with more comfort, and more real illumination.

The fact is some reaction has been needed. For a hundred or two of years there has been in the ascendant a school of piety which made out a violent contrast, or might we say an unnatural divorce, between the active and the mystical spirit. Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder! Things that were intended to be mere *"adjumenta"* became a sort of fetish, and the husk has been often taken for the kernel. However, we had better avoid what looks like controversy, and the more because it is a fact that the ideas to which I was taking exception are fast becoming obsolete. But, of course, when a certain method of treating spiritual topics has become somewhat conventionalised and sanctioned by long tradition, it takes time to get these tendencies superseded by a more vital system and to bring directors of souls to regard such problems in the light of first principles. I will presume to say this. Any real Mysticism

must necessarily involve a very high degree of all the ascetic virtues. All authorities agree that the only road to contemplation is rigorous self-denial and absolute freedom from all attachments, mental or moral, which can distract from absorption in the holy will of God. Only those who have tried it can know what this involves. Nor is that all. The true mystic is absorbed in God, not, as it were, merely for his own satisfaction, but as the best and for him the only way of fulfilling God's will, as made known to him in prayer. But is God's will manifested to us no otherwise than in and through contemplation? That this is the mystic's own idea is sometimes assumed by those who are afraid of the whole thing, and perhaps it is sometimes the idea of the contemplative. But if so, he or she is not a true mystic according to the ideas of the Catholic religion. Absolute submission to authority, absolute fidelity to rule and the requirements of duty, is ever recognized as the test of the contemplatives's spirit. If his or her prayer causes anything approaching personal infallibility or any form of egotism,—and we do not deny that this may happen even among Catholics,—then the supposed inspiration is known to be not from Heaven. Those who would raise opposition between the ascetic and the mystical spirit should make themselves acquainted with the facts. They will find, on examining the record of all approved mystics, not merely that their virtue was of a very high order, but also that it drew its inspiration

from the prie-dieu. We are not again to go over the ground we have already covered in our remarks upon False Mysticism. It must be admitted that the circulation of false money in a locality, even when it is hard to detect, ought not to make people prize the coin of the realm less. If we sometimes meet foolish and mistaken people going about like wolves in sheep's clothing, let us be on our guard, but not drive away the sheep from their proper pasture.

Why are spiritual people to be for ever trained in asceticism without ever letting them reap the fruit of their work? Surely the aim of their life is to become united to God, and that is what Mysticism claims to effect by a short and direct method. Would you keep a learner at the piano scales and exercises for ever, without allowing him to play a piece? Or would you even try to train a young horse without ever putting him at a real fence? Leading-strings are good,—but only up to a certain point.

In this practical sphere we are bound to admit that, however we may theorize, the distinction between what is fully "mystical" (though perhaps in a rudimentary stage), and what is not, is in certain cases difficult to discern. But all the same it is fairly certain that mystical tendencies in the deepest sense are often found among persons who have by no means received any conscious preparation for them. Such tendencies have only to be encouraged and strengthened, without the intro-

duction of new and unfamiliar principles, by those who desire to help souls to greater freedom with God. Very often cases occur of souls who are really practising "passive" prayer, not because they wish to or know anything about it specifically, but because they find themselves wholly unable to use their faculties in the way of discourse, or any activity. Such persons are badly in need of direction, and probably very often they are guided aright more by a sort of instinct of their confessor than from a deep insight or appreciation of their state. But even apart from cases of marked attraction towards mystical contemplation, we may note in the ordinary or ascetic training of religious elements which make for passivity. One of these is the habit, especially in the case of nuns, of addressing them as Spouses of Christ. This idea, which is, of course, taken direct from Scripture, is made very familiar, being frequently harped upon by all classes of spiritual writers. But it lies very much at the root of the more mystical methods of prayer; if allowed to work, it will make for an attitude of familiarity with God and of passivity of the faculties. A slight study of the writings of the greatest mystics of both sexes, especially of women, will make it clear, how deeply their minds and souls were soaked with the conviction, which we find in the *Canticle* of Solomon and the Epistles of St. Paul, that God truly regards the sanctified soul as his spouse and treats it accordingly. And undoubtedly many have been driven forward in the

paths of sanctity and contemplation by this conviction in spite of a narrow spiritual outlook in other directions.

Again, there is the growth in later times of devotion to the Holy Ghost, even among many who do not quite realize its implications, though they find it is helping them in the way of God. For this great devotion not merely induces Mysticism, but it is the very substance of it. To be devoted to the Third Person of the Trinity surely includes a belief that he gives strong lead to the soul in prayer; and the more a soul trusts in the direct guidance of God, the more she will, perhaps quite unconsciously, become passive in his hands. Hence, practically we should say that no better or safer course could be followed by those who desire to see an improvement than to insist much on the importance of this devotion. It is a thing that, as far as we know, no one has ventured to oppose, and it will silently and infallibly work a reform if not a revolution among those who avail themselves of it.

It is curious that the Society of Jesus is saddled with a worse repute than it deserves in regard to contemplation. A restricted and somewhat deadening method of prayer is sometimes spoken of as though is were specially the "Jesuit" method. Our Fathers may indeed not have been clear of reproach in this matter, very likely they often deserved it;—but yet how much has the Order to its account as promoting mystical prayer! In the *Spiritual Exercises* of the Founder it is true that

considerable attention is given to discursive prayer and its systemization; but, on the other hand, what a fountain of pure Mysticism is contained in his teaching! We have had reason to refer more than once to the *Discernment of Spirits* which of itself forms a valuable guide to contemplation; and plenty of evidence is contained elsewhere in the book that St. Ignatius was filled with a mystical spirit, and intended to promote docility to the Holy Ghost,[1] and a spirit of thorough freedom in prayer.

Again, if we look at the early history of the Society, we find that it produced many eminent contemplatives. We have had occasion to quote Fr. Suarez, than whom no more perfect guide to mystical prayer, especially on the theoretical side, could be found. If in his teaching he follows

[1] To prove this fully would require a treatise. But we may here refer to a passage of the "Additions of the First (or Purgative) Week" (n. 4), in which the Saint recommends his disciples "to remain without any anxiety of proceeding further in that point in which they *find that which they desire*"; to that in which he states in the "Triple Time for making a good Election" that "much brightness and knowledge may be gained through the experience of consolation and desolation"; to the Second and Third Methods of prayer, which appear to me to lead directly to contemplation; to his whole treatment of scruples, which are to be cured by the spirit of liberty; to the "Contemplation of Divine Love," which, though not perhaps mystical in form, has a strong tendency towards the Prayer of Union; and, most of all, to that tone of intense personal and enthusiastic devotion to Christ with which the *Exercises* are instinct, and which is so characteristic of the sublimest Mysticism that it could proceed from no other source. His dislike of formal rules (See *Summ. of Constitutions*, 1), points in the same direction.

St. Thomas very closely, yet surely he has done much to elucidate and develop the *Summa* in its mystical aspects. B. Peter Faber, Ven. Louis da Ponte, Fr. Lessius, the two Frs. Alvarez, Ven. Colombière, Fr. Segneri, Fr. Louis Lallement, are names that occur to one of high authorities on the subject, and many others only less great could be named. St. Teresa was directed by Jesuits, and wished that her daughters should be likewise directed, so much so that she declined to found houses where she was not sure that she could obtain Jesuit confessors.

If now we look at our own time, we shall find that Jesuit writers have been and are in the forefront of those who are working for the revival of Mysticism and for the abandonment of that mechanical spirit of meditation, which, however it may have been called for by special circumstances in the past, can hardly be thought suited to the exigencies of our generation.

INDEX

"Abasement" of Mystics, 157
Abélard, 113
"Active" Life, 205-11
"Activity" in Passive Prayer, 151
Aiken, Prof., 80
American Oriental Journal, 65
Anthropomorphic notion of God, 345
Apocalypse, 175
"Apostolic" Element in Contemplation, 156-7
Aristotle, 53, 55
Ascetic Discipline, 92
Ascetic Life, 262
Aspects of Contemplation, 7
"Ataraxia," 79
Autobiography, St. Teresa, 106
"Auto-matic" utterances, 103
Automatism, 129-30

Bampton Lectures of Dean Inge, 101
Beatific Vision, 143, 161, 186, 190, 191
Beatitudes, St. Thomas on, 11
Beauty, Idea of Absolute, 50
"Being," (analogical term), 82
Belfast, University Appeal (see Privy Council)
Belgian Missioners (on Hinduism), 67
Bellarmine, Robert, 15-17, 87
Benedict XV on Bellarmine, 15
Benn, A. W., 53, 55
Beza on Suarez, 15
Bilocation, 99
Blessed Virgin, the, 10, 176-8
Brahma, Religion of, 68, 69
Brahman Contemplation, 69
Buddhist Contemplation, 74-85
Buddhist Moral Code, 80
Buddhists, numbers of, 74
Burnet, Prof., 51
Butler, O. S. C., Fr., 18

Canticle of Canticles, 131
Carmichael, M., 94
Catholic Faith, transcendental, 2
Catholic Philosophy attacked, 28
"Certainty" of Divine Faith, 227
Clement VIII and Bellarmine, 15, 17
Confessions, St. Augustine, 106, 114
Connotation of "Mystic," "Mystical," 2

"Consciousness" and "Conscience," 4
Contemplation, difficulty of, 44
Contemplation, Natural, 43
Conversion to Catholicity, 259-64
Coordination of Theologies, 6
Cousin's pantheism, 67

Dangers of Mystical Prayer, 268-71
"Dark Night" see Obscurity in Prayer
"Deliverance" in Brahmanism, 69
"Deliverance" in Buddhism, 77
Deussen, Prof., 69
De Lugo, S. J., Fr., 20
"Dhyâna," degrees of, 77-8
Dionysius (pseudo), 63, 185
Distractions in Prayer, 139
Divorce of Mystical from Dogmatic Theology, 6
Dogmatic Theology, 5
Dublin Review, 19
Dubois, Abbé, 65

Ecstasy, 98-9, 108, 269
"Egotism" in Contemplation, 92
Enneads of Plotinus, 60
Epistles of Plato, 51
Eros, Doctrine of, 50
Eriugena, 63
"Eximius," Doctor (Suarez), 12
Existence of God, 26 ff.
Existence of God, 26 ff., 228
Experience of Directors, 272
Extraordinary Gifts and Manifestations, 99-106, 145, 159-60, 202
Eucharist, influence on Mysticism, 118-9

Faith, Divine (nature of act), 225-33, 235, 257, and passim
Faith, Divine (necessity of), 45
Faith, Divine (object of), 228, 252
False Mysticism, *see* Perversion
Franzelin, Card., 18
Fraud, tendency to, 96
Freedom in Prayer, 141, 273
French Missioners (on Hinduism), 67
Friendship with God, 131
Fruits of Holy Ghost, 11

Gifford Lectures (Harnack), 56
Gifts of Holy Ghost, 11
God revealed in Nature, 111
God, Christian view of, 111
Greek Philosophers of Benn, 53
Gregory VI, Pope, 105
"Guroo," 72

Hebrews (Epistle), 45
Harnack, Prof., 56
Hellenic forms of Mysticism, 49
Hiddenness of God, 147
Hindu Religion, 67
Holy Ghost, Devotion to, 125-8, 277

Holy Ghost, Gifts of, 221-3, 242, 254
Howley, Prof. J. W., 139, 181-6, 192, 251
Hypostases, of Plotinus, 59

Ibañez, Fr., 106
Idea of a University, 33
Idea of Absolute Beauty, 50
Idea of God, 27, 29
Idea of God (Negative), 29, 32, 35
Idea of God (positive), 30, 32
Idea of "Good" (Plato's), 27, 51
Illumination in Prayer, 156
Imagination, power of, 92-5
Immanence, the Divine, 32
India, religions of, 66
India, influence on Neoplatonism, 68, 78
Indian Contemplation, 67-74
Inge, Dean, 51, 56, 69, 101
Intuitues, applied to Contemplation, 170
Isaias, 148, 246
Italian Missioners on Hinduism, 67

James, Prof. William, 33, 37-9, 103, 182, 199
Jeremy (H. Walpole), 93
Jesu Dulcis Memoria, 113
Jesuits, the, 67, 71
Job, the Prophet, 47
John II, Pope, Declaration of, 10
John William Walshe (Carmichael), 94

Kennedy, Prof. D. J., O. P., 10

Lamballe, Fr. E., 239
Legge, Prof., 74
Lessius, 9
Leo XIII & S. Heart, 124-5
Levitation, 99
Love (human), illustration from, 130-1, 276

MacDonald, D. B., 65
Marie de la Trinité, 145, 153
Mary of S. Heart, Sister, 124-5
Material of Mystical Theology, 5
Meditation, Rules for, 133
Meleady, O. D. C., Fr., 249, 253
Metaphysical Society, 18
Mill, J. S., 19
Monasticism, Doctrine of, 91, 200
Monasticism, European, 113
Moses, the prophet, 175-6
Muller, Max (on the Vedântâ), 68
Mysteries of the Incarnation, related to mysticism, 112
Mystic Way, The, 62
"Mystical" Knowledge of God, 3
Mystical Knowledge not Vision, 164 ff.
Mystical Theology, 3
Mysticism and Dogma, 5
Mysticism, definition of, 1, 5
Mysticism (natural), 41

Mysticism, not purely theoretic science, 5
Mysticism, recent treatises about, 3
Mysticism, tendencies toward, 36, 267-8

Natural helps to prayer, 47-9, 83-5
Natural Theology, 24 ff.
Negative Idea of God, 29, 35, 182
Neo-Platonism, 53, 65, 68, 171
Neurosis, 199
Newman, Card. J. H., 33, 262
"Nirvâna," meaning of, 75-8
Non-Catholic authorities, 7

Objectivity of external things (how indemonstrable), 26
"Obscurity" in Act of Faith, 226-31, 236
"Obscurity" in Prayer, 148-56, 236, 260
O'Reilly, Edmund, S. J., 18
Oriental religion, 64, 78
Orthodoxy as Test, 104
Ostia, Augustine at, 113

Pagan and Christian Mysticism contrasted, 110-6
Pantheism (futility of), 31
Pantheism, Hindu, 67
Paray, Revelations at, 120-5
"Passivity" in Prayer, 135-47, 266-8, 276
Perfections, The Divine, 31
"Periods" of Hindu Contemplation, 70
Persia, Sufuism, 65
Perversion, 3 stages of, 91-8
Perverted Mysticism, 86-98, 275
Pilgrim's Progress, The, 94
Pius IX, 22
Poulain, Père, 108, 138
Poussin, Prof. L. de La V., 69, 74
Plato, 27, 30, 49, 53, 58, 110, 116, 205
Plato, method of, 58, 89
Platonism, forms of, 491
Platonism, *Symposium*, 50
Platonism, *Timaeus*, 51
Plotinus, 53, 54, 55, 58, 69, 171
Power, S. J., Rev. E., 65
Pragmatism of Prof. W. James, 39
Prayer of "Aspirations," 141
Prayer of "Discourse," 133
Prejudices against Mystical Prayer, 4, 158, (see also Dangers of mystical prayer)
Presence of God, 178
Preventive Mysticism (Negative), 90
Pride, Spiritual, 95
Privy Council (Appeal *re* Chair of Scholasticism), 91
Propaganda, doctrinal, 105-9
Providence, Divine, 47, 115, 117, 144
Psalmist, The, 36
Psychic Science (Use of for Mysticism), 7, 97, 128
Psychology of Mysticism, 7, 97, 254
Purgatory, Dialogue on, 107

Queen's University, Belfast, 91

Quiet, prayer of (contrasted with Quietism), 266

Rapture, see Ecstasy
Reason (as related to Mysticism), 25
Recent Treatises on Mysticism, 3
Reginald, Fr., 10
Reticence of true Mystics, 89, 106
Rhys, David, 75
Richard of St. Victor, 171
Ruskin, John, 30

Sacraments, St. Thomas on, 11
Sacred Heart, Revelations, 105, 120-5, 203
St. Antoninus, 11
St. Augustine, 9, 30, 49, 53, 63, 87, 113, 114, 159, 174
St. Bernard, 9, 87, 113
St. Bonaventure, 9, 63, 185
St. Catherine of Genoa, 107
St. Catherine of Siena, 105
St. Charles Borromeo, 11
St. Francis of Assisi, 99, 112, 114
St. Francis of Sales, 108, 240
St. Francis Xavier, 68, 87
St. Gregory, 9
St. Ignatius Loyola, 8, 9, 87, 113, 115, 140, 141, 146, 154, 198, 238, 259, 277
St. Joan of Arc, 9, 87
St. John of Avila, 106
St. John of the Cross, 8, 108, 115, 148, 172, 240, 251
St. Louis, King, 11, 87
St. Margaret Mary, 9, 120-5, 201
St. Paul, 112, 174-5, 198, 223
St. Paul (*at* Athens), 79
St. Pius V, 11
SS. Peter and Paul, 11
St. Teresa, 8, 9, 87, 89, 106, 108, 113, 173, 215, 240, 241
St. Thomas of Aquin, 11, 12, 28, 87, 170, 175, 185, 190, 242-7, 251
St. Vincent Ferrer, 11
Sancta Sophia, 247
Sanctity in relation to Mysticism, 195-203, 218
Schlegel on Indian religion, 68
Schopenhauer on *Upanishads*, 68
Scorraille, Père, on Suarez, 14
"Second Sight," 163
Sense-impressions, validity of, 26
Shakespeare (Hamlet), 37
Sharpe, Rev. A. B., 46, 167-8, 172
Sidgwick, Henry, *Recollections*, 19
"Simplicity," prayer of, 138
Sixtus V., Death of, 15
Society of Jesus, 277
Spinoza's Pantheism, 67
Spiritists, modern, 99, 268
Spiritual Exercises, 140, 159, 277
"Spiritual Marriage," 108, 173
Spiritual Pride, 95
Spiritual Self-indulgence, 96

Spiritualism, see Spiritists
Spouse, see Love (human)
Stigmatization, 99, 113
Suarez, S. J. Fr., 9, 12, 20, 87, 108, 172, 185, 206, 241, 246, 251, 278
Sufuism, 65
Sufi Al-Gozzali, 65
Summa Theologica, 11, 28, 108, 170, 242
"Summum Bonum," doctrine of, 204
Supernatural, The, 5
Supernatural Grace, 84

"Temperament," 197-203
Tennyson Alfred, friend of W. G. Ward, 18
Textbooks of Theology, 8
Theological Virtues, 222-4, 239, 257
Theosophists (Neo-Buddhists), 74, 80
Thibetan religion, 80
Transmigration (Buddhist), 79

Underhill, Miss E., 62
Upanishads, The, 68

Varieties of Religious Experience, 33, 37, 103, 182
Vasquez, S. J., Fr., 20
Vatican Council, Decrees of, 28
Vaughan, Cardinal H., on Dr. Ward, 21
Veda Pantheism, 65
Vedanta, 67
Volition, Power of, 181-94
Von Hügel, *Mystical Element in Religion*, 107

Ward, Dr. W. G., 18-23
Weinhart (in *Dict. de Théol.*), 77
West, Religions of the, 49
Whilty, S. J., Fr., 18
Williams, Prof. 74
Wiseman, Cardinal, 22
World-Movement toward Mysticism, 9

Xavier, St. Francis, 67, 87

Zeller, Prof., 51

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